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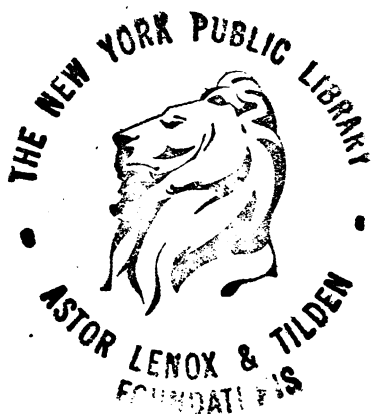
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I MARRIED A WIFE





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**"IN THE BLACK HORSE THERE WAS NOT AN OFFICER
MORE CONTENTED THAN DERRICK LIPSCOMBE."**—

Page 6.

Stannard, Henrietta

I Married a Wife

A NOVEL

BY -

JOHN STRANGE WINTER, pseud.

*Author of "Bootles' Baby," "Private Tinker, and Other
Stories," "In Quarters," "Army Society," "Beautiful
Tim," "Good-Bye," "A Seventh Child,"
"Red Coats," "A Blameless Woman,"
etc., etc.*

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I MARRIED A WIFE.

PART I.

Chapter 1.

ABOUT MYSELF.

I WAS preordained to go into the Army. My father's people had been soldiers for many generations and my mother was the fifth daughter of Sir Hector McAllister, some time Governor of Madras. I have heard her say that her father was the fifth in line who had borne arms under the English crown since that little matter of Cul-loden. All her sisters were married to men in the service, and my cousins, who mostly carried arms of some sort or other, were and are so many that I have long ago given up being surprised when some rank, red-haired, hard-faced Scot with a more or less

unpronounceable name looks at me with a hungry eye and says, "By the by, do you happen to be a grandson of old Sir Hector McAllister, who was once Governor of Madras?" I always answered yes. "And which daughter was your mother?" is generally the next question, for Sir Hector had ten daughters. My mother was the fifth. He had also six sons, and they all went into the Army.

I believe that Sir Hector was a regular old martinet, one of those fierce old persons with a tremendous voice and a bristling moustache, who thought as little of ordering his daughters to have bread and water for a week as he did of strapping the men under him up to the triangles, a man who made a rule of calling all natives, "niggers," and whose wife was a meek little fragment of a woman who seldom spoke above a whisper, and was very careful what she said even then. Somehow, I always felt glad that my maternal grandfather was gathered unto his fathers before there was any chance of my making his acquaintance. From all that my mother has let out—and even still she speaks of him with a sort

of awe and her information leaks out, as it were—he must have been a singularly unpleasant personage. General Lipscombe, my father's father, on the contrary, was of a remarkably amiable disposition. I inherit it. Perhaps I may be just crossed with the dogged firmness of the McAllister blood, at least, when I have said that I will do a thing I do it, and when I have said that I won't do a thing, wild horses would not succeed in making me. I don't know why wild horses should be credited with what may be called a divine right in moral suasion, because the only wild horses that I have ever seen were remarkably unmanageable animals and never showed the smallest desire to make anybody do anything.

I was like most other Indian children, I spent my youth, I mean the tender years of my youth, on the other side of the world to my father and mother. I and my two younger brothers went to school most of the year and spent our holidays with Granny McAllister at Brighton. I don't know why Granny McAllister had pitched upon Brighton when she was left free to choose her own place in the world. She

was free after the removal to a higher sphere of the redoubtable Sir Hector, for he left her everything that he had—which was about fifteen hundred a year—to do as she pleased with during her life, subject to the contingency of her not marrying again. I have heard my mother hint more than once that her father need not have gone to the expense and trouble of putting such a clause in his will, for Granny had had quite enough of matrimony to outlast her stay in this world ; but one of my mother's aunts once told me that, to the very day of his death, Sir Hector was possessed of an insane jealousy of poor old Granny, and quite had an idea that there were at least a dozen men of his own rank and station of life who were only too anxious and willing to carry her off like knights of old and threaten or coax her anew into the bonds of holy matrimony. Be that as it may, Granny was left free save for that one condition, and she chose to pitch her tent at Brighton. She had a large roomy house in a three-sided square facing the sea, and there we youngsters used to come for our holidays, well, really, I could hardly say how many of us. Look-

ing back, I wonder how the poor old lady was able to stand it, but she never could say boo to a goose, and we youngsters must have made the place a perfect pandemonium; but to do us justice we were all inordinately fond of Granny McAllister. In the case of myself and my brothers our mild and rather saintly old grandfather, General Lipscombe, took indeed a very secondary place to that held by the small fragment of a woman with curly white hair and pathetic misty blue eyes, whom we loved and teased and tormented as one only does love and tease and torment those whom one loves very much.

Well, poor old Granny, she is gone now, but it is a very tender memory which remains of her in my heart at all events.

Being the eldest son of the eldest son, although I was not rich, I was certainly brought up with every comfort and almost with every luxury. I did well at school, for I had no fancy for idleness or especially for mischief; I did better at Sandhurst, and I did best of all when I found myself in the thick of the temptations which beset a youngster when he first joins a crack

cavalry regiment. I don't know that the early days of one's life in the Service can be exactly described as a bed of roses, but to every youngster a great deal of his comfort and of the stamp which he will bear for the rest of his army life, very much depend upon the course which he chooses to take in the beginning. Of course, if a youngster likes to be an ass and to spend fifteen hundred a year where he only possesses five, one of two things is sure to follow : either he will have to chuck the Service or he will have to go to his father to get his debts paid. I never saw the sense of doing either. My father allowed me five hundred a year and I found it sufficed amply for all my requirements. I never got drunk in my life, and what is ordinarily called "running amuck" had absolutely no attractions for me. I liked my work, I liked my brother officers, especially my chief, I liked my first quarters, and in the whole of the Black Horse there was not an officer or man who was more thoroughly contented than Derrick Lipscombe.

I don't think that my regimental career was in any sense one out of the common.

I was not an especially popular officer nor did I get myself actively disliked. I had not been in the regiment three months before I was saddled with the *soubriquet* of "Old Slow Coach," partly owing to the fact that I had no taste for anything pertaining to the unclean or for anything that was actually irrational. I was quite willing to submit to the usual course of training which a sub is in the habit of undergoing on first joining. My military traditions had prepared me for much worse than I was called upon to undergo, but the fellows soon found out that it was little or no fun making me their chief butt for such amusement, for by the time midnight arrived I was always in such a state of dead sleepiness that I was practically no good for any of their purposes. I used to say, "All right, old chaps, go on—do as you like, I am not going to interfere," and by the time they had made hay of my furniture and turned my quarters upside down, I was fast asleep between the two who were my captors and guards. After a few turns of this kind of thing at short intervals, my brother officers were so damped with the want of fun which was to

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be squeezed out of me that they practically gave up the attempt to make my life more or less of a burden. One night, for instance, I chanced to overhear a discussion which took place on the veranda, just below my quarters. "What are you going to do to-night?" asked one. "Let's go and draw Lipscombe." "Oh," said another, "what's the good of drawing Lipscombe? The poor old slow coach cannot keep his eyes open, and he doesn't know, till he wakes in the morning, what we have done or anything about it. One might as well draw a cow." Some people might have been offended at such a frank and open statement, but I was not—not in the least. I hailed the news with the intensest satisfaction and took the opportunity, when dinner was drawing to an end, of smothering half a dozen elaborate yawns at such moment as the eyes of the chief roysterers happened to be fixed upon me. I slept the sleep of the just that night and awoke to find my quarters in quite their ordinary condition. How I blessed the strong and healthy constitution which insisted on having that portion of sleep which some wise

chap or other meted out as being only necessary for a fool. But from that day forward I was dubbed "Old Slow Coach," by each and all of my brother officers.

They were a very fine set of fellows, the officers of the Black Horse. Urquhart, the smartest soldier whom it has ever been my lot to see before or since, was in the last year of his command. Now Urquhart was *a man*—Urquhart was *a soldier*! By Jove, he was a fine chap and no mistake about it! Brisk, keen, alert, soldierly, full of fun and humor, of a dignified kind it is true, but still a very model of a man, well above the average height, with eyes that seemed to look through you, a pair of clean cut shoulders, neat as to the feet, and remarkably shy as to women—not rude, you know. I never saw Urquhart when he was not absolutely courteous, but with a certain glacial stiffness about him which forbade any of those little familiarities which make men into tame cats. There were rumors of a story of the past which cropped up from time to time, rumors which I, for one, flatly and absolutely disbelieved. I could not believe in them. For rumor said that once in the

bygone days Urquhart had made an offer of marriage to Lady Staunton's mother, Mrs. Trafford. I never believed it. Lady Staunton was the wife of one of the two senior captains and cousin to Mrs. Marcus Orford, who would one day be Lady Ceespring. The fellows were quite in a flutter of anticipation when it was announced one day that Mrs. Trafford was about to pay her daughter a visit. Many were the speculations as to whether the marriage would come off this time, for some of them genuinely believed in its probability. I took an early opportunity of calling upon little Lady Staunton after her mother arrived, and all I can say is that if, charming as Mrs. Trafford was—and she was charming—but still, charming as she was, if Colonel Urquhart had ever really proposed to her, he must have got a touch of the sun at the previous field day. They were great friends, immense friends, great chums, you know. He dined there and she lunched at mess, and she came to the sports and had the Colonel's rooms, and then she walked out into the square to see the prizes, and she looked up at him and he looked down at her, 'pon

my word, it was very funny! But there was a good deal of seniority on her side, and somehow, friendly and polite and devoted as he seemed to be to her, I don't think he had ever meant marriage. Certainly, she did not, because everybody said that she had refused him. Lady Staunton was a very pretty little creature, not so much to look at, but so lovable and so bonny and so wrapped up in Tony, so proud of the Staunton sapphires. "Oh, yes, I will come," she said one day when the Colonel told her there was a special theatrical display on by the non-commissioned officers. "Oh, yes, I will come, of course, I will. I will put my sapphires on." Now her cousin, Mrs. Marcus Orford, was absolutely lovely, with a curious shy reserve and dignity which kept her from ever developing into the ill-dressed frump which mostly characterizes the soldier's wife. Why is it, I wonder, that soldiers do marry such frumps? They do. It was the first thing that struck me after I found myself quartered in a big garrison. It seemed to me then that soldiers' wives were mostly divided into two classes—I mean, officers' wives, of course—frumps who were

rich women and frumps who were not. I know that we fellows in the Black Horse were tremendously proud of our two smart ladies—Mrs. Orford and little Lady Staunton.

Yes, they were a ripping set of men, the Black Horse. Taking all ranks, I think the one I liked best of all was a man called Brookes, Lester Brookes. He was about half-way up the list of captains. I never could understand how Lester Brookes had remained single so long. He was exceedingly rich, out of the common handsome, had a pleasant, equable temper and as pleasant manners as any man that ever I knew in my life. The women idolized him. I asked him once how it happened that he was not married. He told me, in an off-hand kind of way, that he was not lucky in love, and, although I looked up sharply, I could not for the life of me tell whether he was speaking in joke or in earnest.

Chapter 11.**MISS GERALDINE.**

I HAD been four years in the Black Horse when my father died. I was fearfully cut up at the dear old man's death, for all my life I had only the kindest and most tender recollections of him. He had not so very long come into his family property, for my grandfather, the old general, had lived to a great age. I think you often find that in the children of very long-lived men, those who attain to great age often seem to retain all their vitality for themselves and to hand down to their children only a modicum of their own staying powers. It was certainly so with my grandfather and father, for my grandfather lived to be ninety and was a hale old man at that, and my father died before he was sixty and literally went out like the snuff of a candle.

His death made a considerable difference

in my life, for instead of being merely a subaltern with an allowance of five hundred a year, I came into an estate, the income of which was between two and three thousand, and I found myself at the head of my family. I had no very onerous duties in connection with that position. My two younger brothers were both already in the Service and were suitably provided for. My only sister had married when very young, a man of much seniority both in his regiment and in comparison with his wife. My mother had been dead six or seven years. I think the fellows thought that I was going to break loose and paint the town red on coming into my property, but, as I did not see the good of any such course, I went on living exactly as I had done aforetime. I may have spent a hundred or two more, but certainly I did not exceed that.

So three or four years more went by, until I found myself at the top of the list of subalterns. No particular changes had taken place since my joining, none at least that would interest the reader excepting that Marcus Orford had become Lord Ceespring and was in command of the

regiment. Sir Anthony Staunton was senior major and Lester Brookes ranked next to him. Lester Brookes was still unmarried. I was still "Old Slow Coach" and fully expected to remain such to the end of my regimental chapter.

It was in the January of 1890 that I left the Curragh, where we were then stationed, with two months' leave of absence before me. My destination I need hardly say was London. It seems to me that when a man is quartered in England or Scotland his main idea when he gets his long leave is to pay country-house visits, but when a man is quartered in Ireland or India his main idea when he gets back to England once more is to go to London. At all events, it was mine. I positively spent my first few days going in and out of shops. If I had been a young woman spending her first quarter's pin-money I could not have taken more interest in the details of replacing my outfit. But one cannot shop always, at least a man cannot, and after two days of tailors and outfitters and two evenings at the club, I bethought me that I was frittering my leave away without get-

ting any good from it whatsoever. So the third evening I dined an hour earlier and went to a theatre, and the very first person I particularly noticed after I had taken my seat was a young lady in a box to the right of the stage. I believe they call it the prompt side, but in this theatre the prompter was certainly stuck in a sort of hatchway in the very middle of the proscenium—it was on the right side, anyway. I don't know what it was about her that attracted me. It was not her beauty; although she was extremely pretty, nor her dress, for she was quietly garbed in black and showed but little of her neck. Perhaps it was her manner, so vivacious, so gracious, so sparkling, and yet neither too fast, nor with a trace of vulgarity. She was very fair, with blonde hair to gold at the points, I mean hair that turned to gold in little tendrils strayed over a very white forehead. It seemed to throw out the beautiful hazel eyes. It was not a narrow face, yet it was not fleshy, very refined, with a rather high-brown complexion, and ending in an adorable upward



"THE FIRST PERSON I PARTICULARLY NOTICED WAS
A YOUNG LADY IN A BOX TO THE RIGHT OF THE
STAGE."—*Page 16.*

that was a trifle thin, but which every now and again parted in a brilliant smile lighting up the entire countenance and disclosing exceedingly white and regular teeth, not in the least pearly, but of that strong brilliant whiteness which denotes excellent health and digestion on the part of their owner. In complexion she was of a warm fairness, not rose and lily, but with a mellow healthy color overspreading the entire face and throat, deepening into a brighter tint on the cheeks. She had with her, or she was with, two comparatively unimportant looking ladies, one elderly with much befrizzed gray hair, the other evidently a sister, at least ten years her senior.

Upon my word, I hardly remember what the play was about. I have a dim remembrance of a very beautiful woman with a voice of magic, who struck me as being out of keeping with her companions and her lines alike. Over and over again I found my gaze turning from the scene before me to the outline of that fair and gracious head dimly visible in the stage-box. She was intensely interested in the play; I was intensely interested in her. Perhaps for the first

time in my life I sat through the interval between the first and second acts without stirring from my seat. In truth, I did not wish to lose a single moment of my opportunity for watching the movements of the fair unknown. She and her companions seemed to have plenty to say one to another, but I noticed that she was the one from whom the chief part of their conversation emanated. Then the lights went down again, and we all once more turned our attention to the gracious presence and golden voice of the beautiful woman who was the heroine of the play.

It was at the end of the second act, when I was again kept chained to my seat by this mysterious influence, that I felt a touch upon my shoulder and a man's voice said in my ear—"Why, Lipscombe, old chap, who on earth would have thought of seeing you here!" I looked up to see a man who had left the Black Horse a couple of years previously. "Why, Desmond," I said, "is that really you?"

He sat down in the vacant stall next to mine. "Of course it is: I suppose you are up for your long leave?"

"I am *over* for it," I replied.

"Ah, yes, you are over for it. How do you like Ireland?"

"I don't like it at all," I replied.

"Good hunting?" he remarked.

"So-so. I'd rather have a fortnight in the Shires any day than three months in Ireland."

"Poor old chap! Well, you know, I couldn't stand the idea of going to Ireland. I don't think I should have left the old regiment if it hadn't been for that. How are they all? How long have you come over for?"

"Oh, I have been in Town three days. They are all pretty much as usual. Grenville has sent in his papers and Aubrey Merritt is going to be married."

"Aubrey Merritt? You don't say so!" Then he looked past me in the direction of my enchantress's box, giving a pleased smile of recognition and bowing deferentially. "By Jove! There is Miss Brodie! And Mrs. Brodie, too." He bowed again.

"Who are they?" I asked.

"The Brodies? Oh, you know the Brodies? Why, you must, old fellow.

Mrs. Brodie—I don't know, but Mrs. Brodie is or was or ought to be— Oh, she is *Mrs. Brodie*. She lives in Eaton Terrace. Miss Brodie is very learned—yes, the one with the brown hair. I don't know what she does. She Woman's-Rights and things. But Miss Geraldine is—By Jove! Isn't she pretty, too?"

"The fair one is Miss Geraldine?" I remarked.

"Yes, yes, that is Geraldine. Very pretty, very nice girl. By Jove, I must go and speak to them."

"Well, you may as well take me, too," I said, in a would-be indifferent way.

"Why, of course I will. Come along, old chap. By Jove, you will owe me a good turn for this. Geraldine Brodie is one of the nicest girls in London."

"She looks charming," I remarked, in as careless a tone as I could assume.

He had already passed me and was half-way down the row through which we were obliged to pass. I followed him, and in two minutes had entered the box and was being presented to Mrs. Brodie and her two daughters. I did not have much of a chance

of speaking to Miss Geraldine. Desmond pointedly introduced me to Mrs Brodie and immediately sat down just between the two girls, so that I had no choice but to take the chair next to the old lady. However, I did not grumble so much at that. I could hear Miss Geraldine's conversation in a one-sided kind of way, and I made the most of my opportunities in being very civil to her mother. I told her that I had been a brother-officer of Desmond's, that I was still in his old regiment, and that I had just come over from Ireland for my long leave.

"I suppose, then, that you are only passing through," she remarked.

I replied that I was not passing through, that I had not accepted any country-house invitations so far, because I felt that I had had so much of the wilds that I would be more comfortable in the centre of civilization, and I repeated my little theory about how and why Service men do or do not remain in London during their long leave.

"Well, I hope you will come and see us," said Mrs. Brodie very hospitably. "We are always at home on Sunday afternoons—number 200 Eaton Terrace. Always Sun-

day afternoons. Of course, we miss a good deal through not going out on Sunday afternoons, but our friends are always sure of finding us in, and we are more than amply repaid for any sacrifice we may make in giving up other things. My daughters, you know," she went on, "are so much occupied during the week."

"Is that so?" I asked.

"Well, my eldest daughter," indicating the brown-haired young woman, "she is quite too learned for me to explain. I really don't understand what she goes to and what she does, but she is always going to meetings and speaking and advancing the cause of women. I don't know why, I am sure. I always find the cause of women quite advanced enough for my own personal taste, but then, of course, that is a personal matter. Times change, you know, and women as well as men must march with the times. I always tell Magdalen the same thing, always. I assure you I never dare make an engagement for either of my daughters. If I am weak enough to accept an invitation to dinner for them, I always find they have got some private engagement of

their own. It used to worry me very much at first, but I am getting used to it. The human mind gets used to anything in time." She crossed her hands in her lap and looked at me with a pair of steady blue eyes very much like Miss Geraldine's hazel ones in expression and shape. "So now," she went on, "I often go out to dinner by myself, and if anybody wants them, they must ask for them on their own responsibility. I long ago gave up any idea of arranging my daughters' engagements. But that makes it really imperative that we should have an afternoon and keep to it. So we are always to be found on Sunday afternoons—between four and seven o'clock."

I told Mrs. Brodie that I was simply delighted at her kindness in having asked me to her house. "I know a few people in London," I said to her, "but to be really happy one wants to know so many in such a big place, and it is so much better to know people who really make London their home than people who take a house here or only come up for a season."

Mrs. Brodie agreed with me. She said: "Of course people who only come up for

the season, or who take a furnished house and so on, are really only birds of passage; they really do not understand the inner life of London. Of course you are a bird of passage, too," she added, with a gay laugh.

I agreed with her, but added that possibly I might cease to be such, and that before long I might see the error of my ways and amend them, presupposing that I was inclined to leave the Service.

"There, the lights are going down," she said, in answer to this. "Well, I suppose you are going back to your seats. Then we shall look to see you next Sunday. Mr. Desmond, your friend, Mr. Lipscombe, is coming with you to see me next Sunday afternoon."

"Lipscombe is a lucky chap," said Desmond.

PART II.

Chapter III.**AN IMPRESSION.**

I DULY went along with Desmond on the following Sunday afternoon to Mrs. Brodie's pretty house in Eaton Terrace. It was a pretty house, small, but very tastefully furnished, with a great deal of old china and a great many interesting pictures. The double drawing-room was already well thronged with people when we arrived, and it was evident that this was a house of much popularity. It was evident, too, that the people who frequented it belonged to totally different sets. There were three or four matronly ladies, probably the owners of the carriages which we had seen waiting in the street, and whose unmistakable mission in life was to get through a certain amount of social inter-

course and to keep well abreast of the prevailing fashions. There was a good sprinkling of young men of the butterfly order and two aggressive-looking ladies in garments of excessively masculine cut, who had taken off their soft felt hats and held them under their arms in the way that young men used to do at evening parties. Both had their hair cut short and parted at the side; the locks of one were grizzled, but the other was the head of a comparatively young woman. Then there was a large cow-like lady, the most like a sheep of anything human I had ever beheld in my life. It was curious to see the traces of two domestic animals so faithfully portrayed in one person. I wondered whether she was some one let loose out of an imbecile asylum or what was her particular *métier* in this world.

Miss Geraldine's sharp eyes espied my interest in her. "What are you thinking of?" she asked in an undertone.

"I was wondering who that lady was, Miss Geraldine," I replied meekly.

"What, the lady in the blue velvet dolman?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Oh! What were you thinking of her?"

"I don't think I had better say," I ventured to make reply. "She is very strange looking. Who is she?"

"My dear sir," said Miss Geraldine, "that is the great champion of crushed womanhood."

"You don't say so! Does any one want to crush her?" I gently questioned.

"I should say not," said Miss Geraldine, dimpling all over and showing her brilliant white teeth in a bright smile. "I never heard of anybody who did. She is an unappropriated blessing, it is true, but a very earnest and intellectual woman when you get over the externals."

"Dear me," I said, "is she really the champion of crushed womanhood?"

"She is," said Miss Geraldine. "I give you my word of honor for it. Now, there is another lady here—that good-looking woman with short gray hair and divided skirts— Oh, you didn't know that they were divided skirts? Well, they are, you may take my word for that also. She is the great champion of beaten wives, a very different thing to crushed womanhood."

Crushed womanhood is crushed in the mass, in the abstract as it were ; wives are beaten in the individual. That old lady nearest to the door, with the handsome, striking-looking face and the vivid color, is the champion of free womanhood. She never misses an opportunity of advocating the cause of women's freedom. I don't quite know myself yet what our freedom is to consist of, nor what we shall gain by it when we have got it, but Mrs. Quibbly says she knows and she is very earnest about it, so I daresay it is all right."

"Miss Geraldine," I ventured to ask, "may I inquire whether *you* are the champion of anything?"

"Why, Mr. Lipscombe," she said, turning her radiant eyes upon me, "how little you must know of the world of London as it is! There is not a more earnest champion to be found in the length and breadth of the country than I am."

"Is that indeed so?" I asked in surprise. "And of what are you the champion? Of down-trodden men?"

"Of down-trodden men! Fancy my championing you!" she said, looking with

smiling scorn from my crown to my heels.
"No, I am the champion of children."

A sort of rush came over me. I could not have spoken to save my life. I wanted, although it was the first time I had ever been in the house, the first time I had really spoken to her by myself, I wanted to catch her little gracious lissome figure in my arms and—well, any man will understand. I had admired her before; I fell in love with her in that moment. In my eagerness I drew a step nearer to her. "Miss Geraldine," I said, "what form does it take? Do you ever want any money for children?"

"What!" she cried, with intensest amusement. "Why, I am always pestering people for money. You don't know how much money I can do with. I couldn't tell you the societies for children that I am interested in. There is the 'Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children,'—what a work it is doing! You ought to go down there and see their refuge. You don't understand, you well-dressed, well-fed, healthy, well-born men, what do you know of the sufferings of the little children of the poor? Only people who go among them ever real-

ize the awful depth and horror of the wickedness and cruelty that mankind can show to its own helpless young. I could tell you tales, Mr. Lipscombe, that wouldn't let you sleep a wink to-night."

"Don't tell them to me," I said promptly—"at least, I don't mean that. I would rather you didn't distress yourself, because, look here, I would be delighted to give you money for your schemes, whatever they are."

"I don't take money in that way," she said, shaking her head very seriously. "I take money whenever I can get it, of course; everybody interested in philanthropic work does that, and some women in London take all the money they can get and nobody ever knows where it goes. But mine is always acknowledged for to the uttermost farthing. If you like to give me some money, I will render you an exact account of my stewardship."

"If you will give me a sheet of paper and a penny stamp and a pen and ink I will write you a cheque for twenty pounds now, Miss Geraldine," I said, by way of proving the value of my words.

"Will you? Ah, you are a good sort. Well, now, I will tell you what I will do with it. Some I will give to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, some to the Victoria Hospital—they are doing a big work—I am on the Committee—some of it to the Evelina. I believe in the Evelina," she said, heaving a deep breath, "that is for children who never get better—little incurables. Then I will keep some for the Happy Evenings for the Poor. Oh, you don't know what those happy evenings do! Children who have no play-ground, children who live day after day, week after week, year after year in squalid courts and alleys, eight or nine or ten in the one little room, where the father and mother do all the earning for the family; children who don't know the taste of anything but bread and dripping week in, week out; children who don't know what a green tree is nor a stretch of grass, who are sordid little slaves from the time they can toddle along the floor. We take them away for a few hours—we have them so many times in the month—for so many happy, warm, blessed hours, and we give them *such* a good time! Such

a good time, with toys, and nobody to slap them and nobody to say 'Don't!' Oh, it is like so many hours of Paradise to them. But these evenings cost money. They don't cost much, nothing to the joy they give, nothing, but they cost a certain amount, and some of your big cheque shall go to that. Then I think I must keep a little for one or two cases outside these institutions. I know a little girl," she went on, "I shall get her into the Evelina by and bye, perhaps, if she lives. She has disease of both hip-joints. Did you ever see a diseased hip-joint?" she asked, in a dreamy tone like an after-thought.

I replied promptly that, to my knowledge, I had never seen a diseased bone of any kind.

"Ah!" she said comprehensively, then shook herself as it were from her thoughts. "Well, Mr. Lipscombe, if you can imagine lying in a bed, not a spring bed, not a comfortable bed of down, oh, no, but on a hard straw mattress, with one poor little blanket to cover you and two hard pillows to support you day after day, night after night, alone all day while mother is charing to

make a little poor living ; if you can imagine the cramp, the pain, the weariness of one unable to move herself one hair's-breadth, then you can form some idea of what this particular child's life is—her daily life. If she is awake when her mother gets up in the early morning to go to her day's toil, well, mother lifts her up on to her poor pillows, and she stays there until mother comes home at night. She can just reach so much food, she has nothing to do, she was never taught to read or to write, she has a few battered picture-books that she knows by heart, the fire goes out and she cannot get to mend it, and there she is, except for visits from people such as I am, very few and far between, perfectly helpless and alone. And that is that child's life. I was there one day when the clergyman came to see her. He was very young, very High Church, very priestly, very well-meaning—on the whole, you know, they are good fellows, the parsons—and she said to him, 'You tell me that Christ loves me, God loves me ; if God loves me and Christ understands everything, why does He make me suffer like this ?' I looked hard at

him, wondering what he would say, wondering how he would get out of the corner this child had put him in, and he told her frankly that he didn't know, that he could only believe that it was for some good cause, that it must be for some wise and all-sufficient reason, and to hope that she would try and bear it as patiently as she could; and then he got up and went away with the tears standing in his eyes. I have always respected that man since," said Miss Geraldine, shaking back her head with a suspicious dewiness about her eyes, "but I should never have forgiven him if he had raked up all the cut-and-dried answers that are usually given in such cases, that God, who made all our happiest feelings, God, who gave us all our appreciation of the beautiful, who made the beautiful for us to appreciate, that He was torturing her in this senseless hideous fashion because He loved her, because He loved her more than the happy children who hardly know what pain is."

For a moment I could find nothing to say. I said a while back that I had fallen in love with her. *Fallen!* I was turning

perfect somersaults of love over and over again, and goodness knows where they would land me. "Miss Geraldine," I managed to say at last, "I am not badly off. 'Pon my soul, I didn't know such things happened in this world as you tell me of. Cannot I do something for this child in whom you are interested? Cannot I spend some money on her? Cannot I do anything to alleviate this horrible suffering?"

She looked at me in blank amazement. "Mr. Lipscombe," she said, "do you mean that?"

"Why, of course I do."

"But do you seriously mean can you do anything?"

"Yes."

"Why," she said, "if I had fifty pounds to spend on that child, she wouldn't know herself—she wouldn't know herself. I would buy her the best bed in London, soft fleecy blankets, clean flannelette sheets, a light eider-down to cover her, a proper bed-rest and soft pillows for her poor back. Oh, what shouldn't she have if I had only the money to do it!"

"Miss Geraldine," I said, "you shall have the money."

"Look here, you are a brick! I must shake hands with you. I—I—positively you are making me feel inclined to cry. I—I—cannot help it. You will think me very silly, Mr. Lipscombe, but you don't know what this is to me."

A sudden bright thought came into my mind. "I am only too delighted if I give you pleasure, Miss Geraldine," I said, "and if I can help your good works. You know a soldier, and a poor bachelor, too, has very little chance of knowing anything of what you may call the concentrated misery that there is in the country. One's own men, as a rule, are men taken from the agricultural districts and in the very flower of their youth. They are well fed, well housed, and not always particularly well content, but they do not understand misery as you have painted it. Do you know I feel very much interested in your little protégé. Would it be possible for me to go and see her?"

"Would you like to see her?"

"Yes, I believe I should," I replied.

It was not quite true, but in a sense it was.

"Then," said she, brightening again, "you shall. Look here, you come and fetch me to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock, and I will take you down to see little Emma. Will eleven o'clock suit you?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Geraldine, any time will suit me."

"Because I have ever so much to do in the afternoon. I couldn't manage it later. If you will be here at eleven sharp we will go straight down and see her. It is rather a long way."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," I said, gallantly, and added in my own mind that the longer the journey, the better I should like it.

Chapter IV.**AN EAST END ENTERPRISE.**

I ARRIVED at the house in Eaton Terrace a little before the time appointed by Miss Geraldine. I, of course, had never breathed a word to Desmond as to my arrangement for going to see the sick child. He had chaffed me a little as we walked away up Eaton Terrace together. "Well, old chap," he said, "I must say for an old slow coach like you, you contrived to glue yourself very effectually to Miss Geraldine this afternoon."

"I found Miss Geraldine charming," I said genially.

"My dear chap, she is one of the most charming girls in London. I am glad you had a good time, but I didn't quite intend you to cut me out altogether with her, you know. That was not quite in the bargain."

I laughed, but I was not to be drawn further on the subject, and when we got down to the cab rank he asked me what I was going to do in the evening. I told him I was going to dine at the club. "Well," said he, "I have got to go to a beastly dinner at the Wellington Club. I hate club dinners with women at 'em and cigarettes and things. They are filthy. But I couldn't get out of this, so we can go down as far as St. James's together."

I assented, and when we got to the corner of St. James's Street I dropped him and went on to my own chambers.

I fancy Desmond would have been rather surprised if he could have seen me knocking at the door of Number 200 Eaton Terrace just before eleven the next morning. I had secured a very smart cab and I told the beggar to wait. I hadn't been in the dining-room for more than two minutes when Miss Geraldine came down, wearing a plain serge dress and sealskin coat, and a little velvet hat with some fur trimming on her head. She looked more adorable in this quiet and ladylike garb than she

had done even in her becoming afternoon gown or her pretty evening dress. "Oh, have you kept your cab waiting?" she asked.

I intimated that I had.

"Oh," she said, "it is a very long way. I generally go down in the 'bus."

"I would rather not go in a 'bus if you don't mind, Miss Geraldine," I replied.

"Why?"

"I don't like 'buses."

"I don't suppose you do, but then they cost a great deal less than cabs."

"If you don't mind I would rather keep the cab," I expostulated mildly, "because you see I have already engaged the man by the hour and told him I should want him for at least three hours. I could not very well dismiss him without paying him the full time. I didn't know you preferred 'buses."

"I don't prefer 'buses, but I use them because they are much cheaper than cabs, and because I can take that money for something else."

"I am very sorry," I said meekly. "The next time you take me out, I will try and

remember the 'bus ; this morning, if you don't mind, I think we will take the cab."

My mild persuasions carried the day and we went out to the cab. She gave me the address to which we wished to go ; I gave it to the man. He looked a little surprised, for there was a great difference between Eaton Terrace and the very squalid slum in which this unfortunate child appeared to live. " You had better take your time. It is a long way," I said. " And just keep your whip still, there's a good chap."

He certainly did keep his whip still and he certainly did take his time, for we *crawled*. Miss Geraldine said that she could not see the advantage of cabs over 'buses except that one was more exclusive in them. " I am sure," she said, " a 'bus would get along faster than this cab does. That is the worst of taking a cab by the hour. You don't take a 'bus by the hour, you know, Mr. Lipscombe."

I urged that it was rather my own fault, as I had told the man to keep his whip still, and added that I thought it was a pity to overdrive a horse, particularly

when it would have to stand about for some little time, as it might get a chill.

"I didn't know London cab horses ever got chilled," said Miss Geraldine.

I said that London cab horses were the same as any other horses, but that not being one's own, one didn't know the effect of overdriving or whether they got chills or they didn't. Somehow, Miss Geraldine was not quite so sympathetic about horses as she was about children. Well, I suppose one cannot exude sympathy from every pore, and that one must not expect too much of any one person, even of sympathy. I had quite thought that she would have appreciated my care and kindness for a dumb animal, and would have recognized something of a fellow-feeling with her own tender and philanthropic inclinations, but then, I suppose, a girl living entirely in London has never the same interest in and touch with the animal kingdom as a man who has been all his life brought up among horses, and who regards his gees as the very apple of his eye. No, it never does to expect too much of any one person, even in the way of sympathy.

In due course of time we arrived at our destination. "This is the place," said she, as the cab drew up. "You won't mind going up a good many stairs, will you?"

"Oh dear, no." I did mind, but that had nothing to do with the case. I minded very much, for the stairs which we went up were bare and dark and extremely rickety, in one or two places they were badly broken and in one or two other places there were gaps in the hand-rail which were exceedingly treacherous. She was evidently quite used to them. She flitted up as lightly and gayly as if she were flitting up the broad staircase in Buckingham Palace, and I trod heavily after her, feeling my way by the wall and doing the best for myself that I could under the extremely unpleasant circumstances. At last, when I was beginning to feel that this Jacob's ladder kind of business was no joke, she stopped at a door and tapped lightly upon it. A voice within bade us enter and she passed in in front of me. "Well, Emma," I heard her say, "I have brought a gentleman to see you. Come in, Mr. Lipscombe,

come in. Well, Emma, and how are you this morning, dear?"

"Ow, ah, me orful bad," was the reply.

I looked at the bed whence the voice, came. It was all and worse than Miss Geraldine had described on the previous afternoon, and lying on the foul and dingy pillows was the figure of a child or a monkey, a something between the two, a dreadful, brown, shrivelled ape-like thing, with a curious keenly astute expression peering out of a pair of small dark brown eyes. She was lying quite helplessly back, her short hair sticking out in every direction, her small thin arms lying outside the dirty coverlet and her brown claw-like hands outspread with a peculiar expression of helplessness. Miss Geraldine pulled up the one empty chair to the side of the bed and took the little shrivelled paw in her own soft gloved hands. "My poor little girl," she said, "I have got great news for you. This gentleman whom I have brought to see you is going to help you to be more comfortable. See, we have brought you some flowers and some grapes. Now are they not nice?"

The creature in the bed turned a pair of



"'MY POOR LITTLE GIRL,' SHE SAID, 'I HAVE GOT
GREAT NEWS FOR YOU.'"—Page 44.



eager eyes upon the basket of grapes which Miss Geraldine released from their ensheathing paper and promptly fixed the talons of her other hand in their midst. "Ow! But them's prime," she remarked, when she had sampled one of them. "Flowers! Wot beauties! Wot did the gentleman do it for, Miss Geraldine?"

"My dear, because he cannot bear to think of your lying here suffering without any comfort about you. That is why—out of sheer kindness and goodness, Emma, and you will have to say thank you to him with all your heart."

"I don't see why 'e should be good to me," said Emma sapiently, "seein' as 'e never set eyes on me afore. But lor, Miss Geraldine, things is queer. Yesterday t' old parson 'e come to see me and ah says to 'im, ah says, 'Wot ah want to know is this:—Wot does Gord make me suffer for like 'E do?' And 'e looks at me and 'e says, 'Becos Gord loves yer, that is why. Gord always makes them as 'E loves best suffer most.' 'Well, then,' says I to t' parson, says I, 'Gord can't think much of you, anyw'y!'"

For a moment I felt more than amply rewarded for my toil up Jacob's ladder. A kind of inward convulsion seized me, but I managed manfully to choke it back. "And what did the gentleman say?" I asked, when I could command my voice.

"Wot did 'e s'y?" repeated Emma, turning her head towards me, "w'y 'e sed 'Chut—chut—chut!' and then 'e told me that mother didn't keep the room over clean, and that he would come and see me another d'y. And then the doctor came in a bit later on and I told 'im wot t' parson had sed."

"What did he say?" I asked.

"Oh, 'e? orl 'e sed was, 'Tommy rot!' That was all 'e sed."

I felt very much inclined to say "Tommy rot" too, for it stands to common sense that no God capable of making such a world as this and such people as are to be found upon it, would deliberately torture a helpless young child with a hideous disease like that from which this child was suffering by way of proving His love for her.

We did not stay very long. Miss Geraldine talked over with the little invalid the

purchases which would be necessary to make her comparatively comfortable and happy. I must say that the child was no fool. Lying there in that narrow world, seeing not a dozen different people in the course of twelve months, utterly ignorant of the stream of life passing to and fro without, she yet had all the shrewdness and worldliness and practical knowledge of your true-born Cockney. Miss Geraldine produced a little note-book and a pencil and between them they made out a list of necessities which we were to be sure to get without "Mother" having the smallest knowledge of what was going on.

"Ah shall be fair fit to bust, Miss Geraldine," said the little creature, wriggling her head to and fro on her poor pillows.

"Ah dunno ow ah shall do it. A new bed for me and a bed rest and plenty of pillers and warm blankets and a feather quilt—do you really mean a feather quilt, Miss Geraldine?"

"Yes."

"And a bed for mother, and a carpet, and a pair of drors to stand in that corner, and a w'ite cover to go on the top, and a

pair of warm curtains to 'ang at that winder, and a'arthrug and—Oh, Miss Geraldine, a arm-chair for mother. But lor, Miss Geraldine, you don't never mean that 'e's goin' to buy all them things?"

"Mr. Lipscombe is going to give me the money to buy them," said Geraldine, nodding at the child and showing all her white teeth again.

The creature turned her beady eyes upon me. "Lor love 'e now," she remarked, "but ah wonder whether Gord sent *'im*."

For answer Miss Geraldine bent down and kissed her, and the child put her two skinny brown arms round the girl's throat and hugged her closely. I felt a sudden curious constriction in my throat and an unexplained kind of feeling that I was looking on at an act of sacrilege.

PART III.

Chapter V.

I AM DONE FOR.

"WHERE are we going now?" I asked, when we got down the rickety stairs and on to the pavement once more.

Miss Geraldine looked at the little watch on her wrist. "I think we have none too much time to get home, particularly if this horse takes as long as it took to come here."

"But I thought you wanted to buy these things?"

"So I do, but not to-day. Let the man drive us towards home, and I will tell you as we go along."

She explained to me that she always did a special kind of shopping when she shopped for the poor. "You see, those great trade princes are most of them on various

committees," she told me. "Now, for instance, there's Cropper, the great upholsterer—you know Cropper's? You see their name in every railway-station in England."

"Oh, I know the name of Cropper," I replied.

"Well, Mr. Cropper, Mr. Ernest Cropper, the head of the firm, is on three committees with me, so, naturally, when I want anything in the way of furniture for the poor, I write him a little note, and he gives me special advantages. I shall get those things that you are going to give me—or the child—for about half the money that you would have to pay for them if you went to a shop and bought them on your own responsibility."

I sat back in the cab and looked at her. What a wife she would make! How she would make the money go and see that she got her shilling's worth for her shilling. I was so lost in my admiration that I never answered her, and she turned sharply round upon me saying, 'Mr. Lipscombe, I don't believe that you are attending to me.'

"I am attending to you with all my heart and soul," I replied, "I am, really."

She didn't seem to see what I meant, but she gave a little sigh of satisfaction and said. "Did you ever see anything so bad as that before?"

"Never!" I replied.

"I thought not. Well, now," looking at her watch again, "we have at least half an hour to spare. Would you like me to take you into the Refuge? Then you can see the latest cases just come in, not the cases that have been fed up and washed and taken care of, but the awful new cases."

I would cheerfully at that moment have gone to the operating theatre of a hospital if it would have given her the smallest pleasure and satisfaction, and we duly went off to the Refuge of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Miss Geraldine seemed to be very well-known there, to be greatly liked, and was warmly welcomed. But I had had quite enough of horrors by the time I got back to Eaton Terrace.

"You will come in and have some lunch?" she said hospitably.

"Oh, I don't think I must do that."

"Oh, yes, come in. Lunch is a very free-and-easy meal with us. My mother will be charmed to see you."

It is impossible to refuse a lady when an invitation is put in that way, so I went in. Mrs. Brodie greeted me with great cordiality. "I suppose Geraldine has had you down among her East-Enders? Poor fellow," she said, "I do feel for you. I don't know really how these girls can endure to go poking round picking up all sorts of horrors as they do. They didn't do it in my day, no girls did; they never thought of it. Girls who lived in the country had a little district or visited among their father's people a little, and that was enough for them."

"Who visited in the towns in your day, mother?"

"I don't know, my dear," replied Mrs. Brodie. "I never did, and I never knew anybody else who did. I suppose there were fanatical people then, but I never knew them."

"I dare say there are plenty of people who would say the same now," said Geraldine easily.

I think Mrs. Brodie worried her daughter a good deal on the subject of her philanthropy. She asked me whether Geraldine had managed to clear my pockets during the morning's expedition and other similar questions of a jokingly disagreeable kind.

"There is something wrong about this curry," said Geraldine, during the course of the meal.

"There is," returned Mrs. Brodie, "and perhaps if you were to stay at home and look after the servants a little, we should have things more comfortable on the whole."

"Ah, but that is your province," said Geraldine, with extreme good-nature. "If I had a house of my own, I should look after it. This is your house, not mine."

"That is the way they always put me off," said Mrs. Brodie, turning to me with a smile that was rather grim.

I could not see myself, as the lady had evidently a good cook, why a daughter should stay at home on purpose to look after such a person; but as it would have been most impolitic to say so, I held my peace and committed myself no further

than by a spasmodic grin which I meant to be very agreeable and pleasant.

When lunch was nearly over Miss Brodie came in, looking very tired and weighed down with an armful of heavy books.

"My dear Magdalen," said her mother, "you have not come in for lunch, surely?"

"Oh, yes, indeed I have, mother. I am so sorry to be late," she replied; "but I have been driven hard all the morning, and I could not possibly get here any sooner. How do you do, Mr. Lipscombe? Has Geraldine been victimizing you this morning?"

"Not at all. I have enjoyed myself immensely," I replied.

"Oh, really? What did she take you to see?" Then went on without waiting for a reply. "Has she enrolled you a member of the Happy Evenings for the Poor, or invoked your aid for her hospitals, or for the other hundred-and-one wild schemes she has in her head?"

"Miss Geraldine has treated me most kindly," I replied.

"Oh, yes, she will be kind enough. Yes, I know Geraldine well. I think it is too bad of you, Geraldine, to keep Mr. Lips-

combe all to yourself when you know how useful he would be to me."

"What for?" asked Geraldine.

"What for? Why, there is my meeting at three o'clock for the advancement of the Higher Education of Women. Are you going to that?"

"No," said Geraldine, "I am not going there. I have a meeting at half-past three that I must attend."

"You had better come to my meeting with me, Mr. Lipscombe," said Miss Brodie. "It will do you a great deal of good and enlighten you very much. You will understand what women are aiming at who want to be put on a higher platform."

"I thought women were on the highest platform of all," I remarked diplomatically.

"Then you made a mistake, Mr. Lipscombe. Women are down-trodden unfortunate wretches."

"Indeed! Is that so?"

"Yes. Brought up in conventionality, cradled in ignorance, kept ignorant, they are not allowed to struggle out of their ignorance. True, there are some people who make a great fuss about women having

votes and serving on juries and all that sort of thing, but that is not what really advanced women are aiming at."

"What are they aiming at?" I asked.

"Well, you come to the meeting this afternoon and you will see. You will hear there far better and far more than I could possibly tell you. Three o'clock, St. James's Hall."

"I am afraid I cannot possibly come this afternoon, Miss Brodie," I said very politely. "I have got a very prosaic engagement at three o'clock. I have to go to my tailor's to get some clothes fitted on."

"Oh, well, if you have an engagement of *that* kind, it is no use my saying anything, but I must say I cannot understand your being willing to put such a triviality against the advancing of a whole sex."

"I am afraid," said I, speaking very diffidently, "that I do not agree with you that the sex requires any advancing."

"Mr. Lipscombe does not believe that they would be any better if they were more highly educated," put in Mrs. Brodie, with a sudden accession of dignity. "I have always said the same thing. What is

the good of women being educated? I am sure, take your little friend Laura de Benham, she has been educated; well, she is Wranglers and things——”

“She is only one Wrangler,” said Miss Brodie.

“Perhaps not, but she is a Wrangler and other things, and I am sure a worse dressed girl you would hardly find anywhere in the length and breadth of the land. I wouldn’t be seen going down Bond Street with Laura de Benham for any consideration.”

Miss Brodie gave a sort of sniff which showed me very plainly that she thought it a matter of small moment whom her mother was or was not seen with in Bond Street or any other street.

Mrs. Brodie caught the look and answered it. “Yes, I know exactly what you feel. I know without your saying it, my dear. You think I am a vain, frivolous, ridiculous old woman, who ought to put her head in a bag and wear a dreadful uniform thing, adopting one costume, so to speak, for the rest of her life. I had a description of a would-be rational costume offered me the other day by a very stout lady who

could never have been a beauty, and who was passionately desirous of making herself the most fearful object that one could possibly imagine. She had discarded all manner of what she called compression. I wonder," said Mrs. Brodie, reflectively toying with her dessert knife, "how I should look if I were to discard all manner of compression." At this point Geraldine giggled. Mrs. Brodie went on with a serene enjoyment of her subject, which must have been very maddening to her eldest daughter. "An entire garment of red flannel from throat to ankles and to wrists, made sufficiently easy to allow full play of every limb and muscle, over that a sort of dressing-gown made of some dark color, woollen for morning, rich silk or velvet for more dressy occasions. A garment, my dears, without any shape or cut or style, with three box pleats at the back which I imagine gave sufficient fulness for all practical purposes, and three box pleats at the front which would conceal pockets, etc., full sleeves and a turn-over collar, and flat buttons with one's initials on them. That was the only touch of vanity in the entire

costume. For out-of-door wear, a Roman toga made of material to match the dressing-gown thing and a hood cut to the shape of the head, well covering the ears. Now I confess that although I am old—and I am really not young—I am a very presentable-looking woman of whom my children need not be ashamed when they walk abroad, but try to imagine for yourselves, all of you, what kind of a creature I should look in such a costume as that. I should say," she ended, flicking crumbs off the tablecloth with the delicate tips of her jewelled fingers, "that my daughters would either of them be justified in forgetting that they had any acquaintance with me if they met me taking my walks abroad, clad in any such fashion."

Chapter VI.**GERALDINE'S ANSWER.**

I SAW a good deal of the Brodies after this, and the more I saw of them, the more intensely interesting I thought them. Miss Geraldine, of course, stood out by herself, as she would have stood out as the bright particular star of any family, no matter what their position or what their natural tastes and proclivities. With every day that passed over my head, I was more and more irretrievably sucked into the maelstrom of love. I had no power to fight against my feelings, and if I had possessed the power, I should not have exerted it. I felt that this bright, winsome, interesting, energetic girl was my fate, and not a day went by that I did not thank my stars that my fate had come to me in so ingenuous and charming a guise. Of course, there

was still a chance that she might not look upon me in a similar way ; but whether she did or not, I would infinitely have preferred that she should be my fate, whether I was hers or not. I found Miss Brodie, Magdalen, interesting, too, but she was interesting in a different way. She had not the same fund of quick, bright humor that so characterized Miss Geraldine. She was terribly in earnest, always in a hurry, always late, and to a certain extent she was an uncomfortable person. Her mother, however, made up amply for all these little shortcomings. Mrs. Brodie was a very amusing woman. She had a curious, practical, every-day, common-sense — not to say commonplace—way of looking at things, especially things that were a little exalted and a little out of the common run. I was never tired of listening to her strictures on the higher and lesser education of women, to her tart little remarks about daughters having duties at home and obligations in their own family circle, and when these interesting topics did not serve, she had a fund of anecdote and an odd little cynical way of summing up her many friends, which

was really as good as a play to listen to. Sometimes, I wondered at Geraldine's extreme good-nature and patience in bearing with her mother's little idiosyncrasies, but certainly her patience was supreme, little short of the angelic.

I don't think that Desmond altogether liked my having become so intimate in Eaton Terrace. I met him there once or twice, when he lifted his eyebrows and said "Hullo, old chap!" in a tone betokening great surprise, most unnecessary surprise. And yet I don't think he was exactly in love with Geraldine himself. It was curious. I never quite understood Desmond, though he was a good sort, taking him all round.

About ten days after our visit to the East End, Miss Geraldine asked me whether I would like to see the improvements which had been effected at my expense in the sick child's room? "I have got everything in and done," she said, "and I assure you you wouldn't know either the place or the child. We prepared it all as a great surprise yesterday for the mother, and I must go down and see Emma to-day to make sure that the

excitement has not had too much effect upon her."

"Then you don't know how the mother took it?" I asked.

"No, I haven't the least idea. You see I had a meeting at four o' clock—a committee—and we were dining out last night, so that I had not time to go back and see how things had turned out, but I must go down this afternoon. If you like to go with me, I should be delighted, and I am sure the child will love you to see all that you have done."

"I will go with pleasure, Miss Geraldine," I said. I would like to have added that I would cheerfully have gone with her to any destination, no matter how squalid or how utterly objectionable it might be.

She bargained for a 'bus and I bargained for a cab. I don't like 'buses. I had been once or twice with her in 'buses to various points of what one might call mendicant interest, and I was in no way weaned from my passion for a more exclusive mode of locomotion. After a little expostulation on my extravagance, she gave way. "I suppose I ought not to call you extravagant,"

she said, with a laugh, "because I have really rooked you most dreadfully since we came to know each other."

"I was very glad to do it," I told her.

"Ah," said she, "that is where you are so good. There are plenty of people who will give one a guinea or two and give it with a grudging air which takes away all the grace and all the beauty of the gift. Now you have given yours so cheerfully and in such a good spirit that I have had a thousand times more pleasure in spending this money than I think I have ever had in spending money for the poor before. Really, you know, Mr. Lipscombe, the room did look so nice when it was done."

"I am delighted to hear it," I replied.

"Oh, it looked quite charming—so bright and cheerful, and the child's satisfaction was so great. You don't know what you have done. You will never quite understand as a woman would what a change it has made in the lives of this woman and this child."

I don't quite know what I had expected, but I nearly jumped out of my skin when I saw the room in which the crippled Emma was lying. It was gay and bright, certainly,

but terribly gaudy. A gaudy carpet with a border covered the centre of the floor, a flaunting hearthrug lay in front of the new fender, the child's bed was covered with an equally gaudy red and white coverlet, and a gay-colored eider-down quilt reposed on the top thereof. There was a gaudiness about the brass trimmings of the bedstead and an aggressive cheerfulness about the cretonne cushions of a large basket chair which had been especially bought for mother! Mother's bed was a modest little affair on the opposite side of the room, but the tablecloth—ye gods! It was too dreadful! A rainbow would be quite dingy to it. On the little delf-rack were disposed some glaring plates and an equally glaring tea-service, bright scarlet curtains hung at the window and the only restful-looking thing in the room was a large aspidistra in a pot, though that was enough to make any one, with an artistic soul, sick. On the mantel-shelf were one or two terrible ornaments that I had seen on the occasion of my first visit, and these had been supplemented by others which were monstrous in their hideousness. The child herself, looking more like an ape

than ever, had her short hair tied up with a scarlet ribbon and she wore a bright blue flannel dressing-gown—at least, I think it was a dressing-gown. On the little table beside the bed was a flaring blue and white cotton cover, a cheap vase containing a few gaudy flowers was set upon it, and there was a little array of food for the day. Beside these things was a small new work-basket, several new picture-books, and a tin box of paints. On the bed half a dozen numbers of the illustrated weeklies were lying. What surprised me was to see the way in which Miss Geraldine looked round this appalling apartment. She pulled up a chair to the bed and took Emma's skinny hand. "Well, and how did the surprise go off?" she asked. "And I have brought Mr. Lipscombe to see the room and to hear from you whether you like it or not."

"Lord love yer, Miss Geraldine," said Emma, who was not a shy child, "but for a minnit ah thort as we 'ad overdone it with mother. Ah thort she was goin' to 'ave a fit or the 'orrors or somethink. She come in and she looked roun' and she gaped. My, but she couldn't make 'ead nor tail of

it. 'Why,' says she, 'wot's the meanin' of this?' And then I ups and I tells 'er, and she sets herself down on that there chair and she jest throwed her apron over 'er 'ead and she cried that bitter I realey thort she was goin' off 'er chump."

"And afterwards?" asked Geraldine.

"Ow, well, she come to, and then she went all round and torked over everythink and seemed as if she couldn't believe her own eyes, and then when she got inter bed, she give a great sigh and she seys, 'It's like bein' in 'eaven,' she seys."

"And how do you find yourself, Emma?" Geraldine asked, still holding the little claw within her own warm clasp.

"Ow, I feel very 'appy this mornin'," said Emma, lying back among her pillows, four of them, and regarding Geraldine with shining eyes. "Ah ain't done countin' up the new things yet. Ah count them up once and then ah looks at 'em again, and ah begins and ah counts them all over again."

"I suppose you were awake very early this morning?"

"Yus. I were awake long afore mother,

but my bed was that prime, I didn't want ter go ter sleep again."

We stayed a little more time talking, but Emma let fall no more pearls. I think the new furniture had had a distinctly damaging effect upon her wit, probably her small heart was too full or her pride or something, for her naturally caustic and exceedingly shrewd observation to have full scope and play. We bade her good-bye, Geraldine having mended the fire, and toiled down the stairs again to the street and the cab.

"Well, what do you think of it?" she asked.

"My dear Miss Geraldine," I replied, perhaps with more candor than discretion, "I never saw such a fearful place in my life."

"But why?"

"The colors! Why, it sets your very teeth on edge a dozen times in a minute. You went and bought the things, I didn't tie you down to a few pounds, but why such colors? The carpet, the rug, the table-covers, the curtains, the child's dressing-gown, everything clashed with everything else. Oh, it was dreadful!"

Geraldine sat back in the cab and laughed heartily. "My dear man," she said, "if I had been going to furnish a room for myself, I should not have bought one thing which you saw to-day up there ; but if I had furnished Emma's room as I would have furnished it for myself, she would not have been a quarter as happy, she would have felt it was dingy and sad, to her it would have been lacking in cheerfulness. You forget how long she has had a dingy room with no color to look on, you forget how long she has been lying among broken things, without enough cheerfulness to warm the heart of a fly. I chose what I knew perfectly well would suit her taste, her mother's, and that of their neighbors, not in any way to please either yours or mine."

"Oh, just as you like," I said. "I left it all to you. You know better than I do, but it struck me as being too dreadful for words. I was appalled for a moment to think that you could have shown such a horrible want of taste."

"She laughed again. "Ah, my taste is right enough, Mr. Lipscombe, but you want

to suit even your taste to your companion. When I buy furniture for myself I will buy it to suit my own taste, that is a very different thing."

"I wish, Miss Geraldine," I said, blurt-
ing the words out in a great hurry and
looking straight ahead of me as if some
object of intense interest were in front of
us, "I wish that you would give me an
opportunity of seeing how you would fur-
nish a house of your own."

"I don't want a house of my own," she
said sensibly. "I shouldn't know what to
do with it. I couldn't live in it by my-
self."

"I don't mean you to live in it by your-
self, I mean you to live in it with me."

I was conscious that she looked at me,
although I was not looking at her. There
was a moment's silence. "Mr. Lipscombe,"
she said in an astonished tone, "do you
realize what you are saying?"

"Very much so, Miss Geraldine," I
replied meekly. "I was saying that I
wished that you would give me the chance
of seeing how you would furnish a house
for us two to live in."

"But—but—does that mean——?"

"Yes, Miss Geraldine, it does mean that," I said, turning and looking at her at last. "Surely you must have seen that—that—well, I am very much in love with you, and that my greatest happiness would be if you consented to marry me. I am rather well off——"

She put her hand up as if to stop me. "Don't talk about being well off," she said, very seriously, "that is the last consideration of all, or ought to be. It would make no difference to me whether you were well off or not if—if—if other things were agreeable."

"But are they?" I asked, all in a hurry. "Don't you think you could say yes and let us try the experiment? Geraldine, you must know how awfully in love with you I am." I felt that I was playing my part very lamely, but, for the life of me, I couldn't get my words out any more clearly or more easily.

Geraldine didn't seem to notice it. She turned and looked at me with a new expression, one that I had never seen before. It was not exactly pathetic, but it emboldened

me to take her hand under cover of the doors of the cab. "Geraldine, you will say yes?" I said.

And Geraldine did say yes—at least, if she did not actually say yes in that one little word of three letters, she implied it, and we arrived back in Eaton Terrace betrothed lovers.

"But, Mr. Lipscombe," she said, when we had somewhat recovered ourselves and I had ventured to kiss her under shelter of the fact that we were driving leisurely through some exceedingly dingy streets, wherein it was not likely we should see any one who was known to either of us.

"Not Mr. Lipscombe," I said, stopping her. "Couldn't you call me Derrick or Derry as my own people always call me?"

"Yes, Derrick, I might," she said. "It is a very nice name. Your people were very sensible when they christened you."

"Oh, I have no fault to find with my people in that way," I returned, sitting sideways and feasting my eyes upon her.

"I was going to say something to you," she went on presently.

"Yes, you were."

"Well, what I wanted to say was this: We shall have for the present to live in the provinces?"

"Well, dear, as long as I remain in the Service—and I don't at all want to leave it—of course we shall have to follow the drum."

"Yes, that will be very nice. What I wanted to say was this—you won't expect me quite to give up my outside interests in life?"

"And what may they be?"

"Well, you will not object to my visiting the poor and doing a little good where I can? I suppose I may visit among the soldiers' wives, and so on? I shall find some scope?"

"Oh, my darling, plenty of scope," I said, without hesitation. "They are not quite as squalid as some of your people up here in London, but they have their trials and their bad times. Those that are married on the strength have to bring up their families in one room, and those that are not on the strength have to bring up their families as best they can on next to nothing. Of course when a regiment is moved off into

quarters at a long distance away, then ranks of soldiers' wives and children whether on the strength or not, find it pinch terribly hard. I am quite sure, Geraldine, if you never go outside our own regiment, you will always find your hands more than full."

"Ah," said she, "but you don't know how much my hands are capable of holding."

PART IV.

Chapter VII.

CONGRATULATIONS.

GERALDINE took me up into the drawing-room, and we had some tea with Mrs. Brodie before she went off to a meeting from which I had promised to fetch her punctually at half-past six. Left alone with Mrs. Brodie, I very soon plunged into the subject which was just then uppermost in my thoughts. She was knitting as I talked to her, a long, man's stocking of heather mixture wool, very elaborate and shapely.

"Now, isn't that a splendid stocking?" she said, stretching it out, and holding it up the better to display it. "I am not like

my girls—I don't excel in charity work. I never did like poor people—they are so dirty—but I always keep our old coachman, who was pensioned off by my husband years ago, in stockings. The old woman has got rheumatism in her hands and she had to give up knitting, so I always keep old Barrett going in stockings."

"I am sure old Barrett must be very grateful," I said, regarding the stocking with admiring eyes.

"Yes, poor old dear, I believe he is. When I am anywhere in his neighborhood I always make a point of going to see him, and I always send him a hamper at Christmas, and occasionally a pound of tea for his wife and a little tobacco for himself. His stockings I make my sole charge. I think there is a great deal in old people being well shod, and having their legs warmly covered."

"I am quite sure of it. And the old man lives where?"

"Oh, he lives down in Surrey, not very far from Guildford. He is quite a dear old thing, and entirely devoted to all of us. He was with my husband for—oh, years and

years and years ; in fact, he was with my husband's father before him."

"Mrs. Brodie," I said, seizing a perhaps not very opportune pause, "I don't know what you will say to me."

"She looked up.

"But I have done something this afternoon, which I sincerely hope you will approve of."

"I hope I shall. What is it?" she asked.

"I have been asking Geraldine to marry me."

"Geraldine? And she said yes?"

"She has done me that honor."

"My dear Mr. Lipscombe, I am delighted to hear it. It is the most sensible thing Geraldine has done for a long time. Dear me, you don't say so! Well, upon my word, I didn't think one of my girls was going to do anything so sensible as marry anybody. Did she really say yes?"

"She really did."

"Dear me! But to my knowledge she has refused seven men since last year."

"Is that really so?"

"Yes. I began to think that Geraldine was preordained to become an old maid. Of course, Magdalen is hopeless—hopeless. Women only take to higher education when they don't feel any inclination to matrimony."

"But Geraldine hasn't sought after higher education?"

"No, she has never gone in for that kind of thing, to my great relief and satisfaction. She is quite bad enough as she is."

"My dear Mrs. Brodie——" I began.

"Oh! I mean no disparagement to your choice, Mr. Lipscombe, not the least in the world. Geraldine is a very pretty girl and a very nice girl, but a little bitten with these philanthropic notions, a little inclined to work herself to death for people who never say thank you, and who will tell you as bold as brass to your face that it is your mission to look after God's poor. I have never believed in the mission of looking after God's poor myself," said Mrs. Brodie, taking up her knitting again, and clicking the needles together, as if she were going to revolutionize the whole of society.

"But it is that which has so attracted me in Geraldine."

"Oh, don't you tell me that, Mr. Lipscombe; don't you tell me that. I saw you look at Geraldine the night you came into our box in the theatre, and you knew nothing about the poor then, or Geraldine's philanthropy, or anything else but about Geraldine's face and figure. Never you tell me that you were attracted to Geraldine by all these fid-fads of hers about East-Enders, because it is nonsense. It won't wash, Mr. Lipscombe, it won't wash!"

I felt it was no use arguing with the old lady. I felt also that there was a good deal of truth in what she said, that I really had fallen in love with Geraldine before I knew anything of her efforts of philanthropy.

"And you intend to remain in the Service?" she went on, briskly.

"Oh, yes. Geraldine is, I think, very pleased that I should do so."

"And you will take her away out of London?"

"Well, I am afraid that I shall have to do that."

“Very good thing, too. I am very fond of both my girls, particularly of Geraldine, my baby, you know, my baby, but it will be much better for her to go into a new life, and to have nothing of the old dragging at her. She will get new interests, and as time goes on she will have more to look after and to do. I shall be quite relieved when I know she is safe out of London without having had either her throat cut or the small-pox. I assure you that for years past—well, for quite three years—I have lived in daily and hourly dread of Geraldine’s being brought home on a stretcher, or of getting a telegram to say that she was lying with a broken head in some hospital, or of having her sickening for small-pox or typhoid or something dreadful of that kind, to say nothing of the lesser evils she might bring with her. I don’t say but that the dear child has done a great deal of good and brought a great deal of sunshine into lives that are sad and homes that are dreary, but I don’t quite think it is work for a young girl—she is my child, but I think I may say for a young girl of Geraldine’s attractions, I shall be very pleased,

I shall be more than pleased. Mr. Lipscombe, you have my heartiest congratulations."

Let Mrs. Brodie say what she would regarding Geraldine's fid-fads about East-Enders, she undoubtedly was a very good daughter. I fetched her from her meeting at half-past six and took her home in a cab. Her first words were, "Have you told mother?" I said that I had done so and, in a few words, told her the gist of Mrs. Brodie's remarks. Geraldine was unfeignedly delighted. "Dear mother," she said, nestling her hand into mine and looking at me with those wonderful, misty, hazel eyes of hers, "she makes believe that she doesn't like our going in for outside interests, our fid-fads as she always calls them, and she loves to pretend that she would like us to look after the cook and so on, but really, you know, she is really delighted at our having something in us a little more than the ordinary girl."

"Of course she is very pleased, of course she is very proud of you," I said, making the most of the hand still in my own, "but all the same she wouldn't have it that I

loved you better for what she calls your fads, and I don't know whether she isn't right—on my word, I don't. I think, Geraldine, that I loved you that night in the theatre before I knew even what your name was or anything about you."

Well, you know how people talk in the first flush of their engaged happiness. We were no exception to the general rule. Why should we be? We were young, well-looking, easily placed in the world and very much in love with each other; we were as—well, what the world calls "silly" as any couple could very well be.

Everybody was wonderfully kind and sympathetic to us. The only approach to a damper which fell upon our engagement came from my future sister-in-law, Magdalen Brodie. She received the news when she came in that evening. It was just as I was leaving Eaton Terrace to rush back to my chambers to dress for dinner, after which I was going to take Mrs. Brodie and Geraldine to a theatre. "Oh, Mr. Lipscombe, is that you?" she said.

I noticed that she looked very tired and that she had a heavy bundle of books under

her arm. She put them down with a fagged air and shook hands in a limp kind of way. I had never seen Magdalen Brodie look so exhausted before. "Miss Brodie," I said, taking both her hands in mine, for I felt anxious that everybody should know of my happiness, "I have a great piece of news to tell you. Geraldine has promised to marry me."

"Geraldine!" she repeated. "To marry you! I am very sorry."

"You are very sorry? But why?"

"Oh, not on account of you, of course not. You are a very nice young man and I have nothing against you personally, Mr. Lipscombe, but Geraldine is giving up so much. I thought better of her, I must confess I did."

"You thought better of Geraldine! But why?" I felt hurt and amazed that she should take the news of my great good fortune and happiness in such a grudging manner.

"Yes, it is very nice for you, of course, I don't deny that, but a thousand pities for Geraldine—just when she is doing such good work, too. That is the worst of

women, as soon as they take up any particular line of work in real good earnest—or what seems like real good earnest—some man comes along and throws the apple and they cannot resist it—Atalanta's race over again."

I was simply speechless with dismay and indignation. I don't know what I should have done if the old lady had not come to my rescue. I liked Mrs. Brodie better than ever for the vigorous onslaught which she made upon Magdalen's fid-fads, and I am bound to say, let the world speak as it will of mothers-in-law, that my own always stood by me through thick and thin,—yes, always, from first to last. "Really, Magdalen," she said, in her brisk brusque way, "you had better go and dress for dinner."

"I am not going to dress," said Magdalen.

"Oh, you are going to another of them ! Very well, my dear, then you had better go and wash your hands for dinner ; I suppose even the committee meeting won't preclude that little observance to conventionality. But, for goodness' sake, don't stay talking

nonsense to these two dear things ; they are very happy and it is no use croaking like a raven at the feast."

"I didn't know that ravens did croak at feasts," said Magdalen, looking at her mother in a hopeless kind of way.

"No, I daresay I am wrong ; I don't belong to the higher cult and I am old-fashioned and prejudiced, and a great many other foolish things, my dear. But I particularly request that you do not try to cast a gloom over to what to us three, at all events, is a very joyful occasion. As to your wishing greater things, or better things, or other things, for dear Geraldine, I can only say that I am but too thankful that Geraldine has come to her senses at last, and that she has definitely made up her mind to follow a really sensible and natural course. As to women getting married, why, of course they get married ; men couldn't get married without women, could they ? And all the greatest philanthropic men have been married men, you must know that, Magdalen, perfectly well. The greatest philanthropic work a woman can do to my mind,"

said Mrs. Brodie, looking at her stocking and knitting as if her soul's salvation depended upon it, "is to make some good and worthy fellow happy, to be the nucleus and centre of a happy home, and to do her duty in that state of life in which it has pleased Providence to place her. Geraldine has for years past given up the main part of her life to bringing happiness into dark and dreary homes, and although, for my own part, I don't think it was quite work for a young girl—particularly a young girl of Geraldine's natural attractions—at the same time she has brought sunshine into many dark places and brightness into many dreary lives, and it is but due to her that her happiness should have come to her in a measure through her work for others. It would be hard, indeed, if Geraldine, after working so for those who could never repay her, should not have some reward in her own life. You must forgive me, Mr. Lipscombe, for alluding to you in such—what shall I say?—in such exceedingly commonplace terms as *good* and *worthy*, I mean a compliment to you."

"My dear Mrs. Brodie," I said, "I am most honored and flattered that you should think of me in those terms. I hope that I shall prove myself always deserving of them."

"Oh, my dear boy," she said, in her airiest tone and with her most decided toss of the head, "I have no doubt whatever that you will; and, after all, you must remember that although Geraldine has indulged in fid-fads—I shall always call them the same, Magdalen, so you need not frown at me—they have been fid-fads of what one might call a human description; they have not been unnatural or striving after the ridiculous in womankind. I am sure," Mrs. Brodie went on, knitting harder than ever, "when I think of the creatures who come here on Sunday afternoons——"

"If my friends are not welcome here——" began Magdalen.

"Oh, my dear, you are sure your friends are welcome—more than welcome, they amuse my friends immensely—but when I think of the creatures that come here with their mannish coats, their hats stuck under

their arms and their hands in their trouser pockets, so to speak, and hear them talking about higher aims and freedom and all the rest of the rubbish they go in for, I am sure that our friend here ought to be thankful every day of his life—every day, every hour of his life—that the girl he has chosen has only been bitten with the fad and the wish to make others happy, not to make herself a ludicrous and ridiculous object in appearance, or a person of any *outré* views whatever.”

By what was evidently a great effort Magdalen Brodie pulled herself together.

“My dear mother,” she said, in a voice of concentrated coolness, which I knew to be the result of great self-control, “it is a great pity that our views differ so much, but isn’t it rather hard to make Mr. Lipscombe feel that he is about to enter a contentious family who delight to have their disputes—for we cannot call them quarrels—in public? I daresay it is rather hard on you—oh, very hard—that you have not been blessed with daughters whose only idea is to cram as many parties into one evening as human

nature and a brougham can manage to fit in; and, on the other hand, it is rather hard for us that we should have a mother who objects to our making ourselves useful in our day and generation. Still, we have managed to hit it off very happily, at least, it has always seemed so, and we won't begin to quarrel now when one of your daughters is pleasing you by doing such a very conventional thing as getting married."

"I never quarrel," said Mrs. Brodie, rolling up her knitting and sticking the four needles into the ball of brown worsted.

"I didn't mean to imply that," said Magdalen hastily. "I ought not to have said exactly what I thought, but your news surprised me. The truth is, Mr. Lipscombe, I have seen so many men look as you have looked lately for Geraldine, and they have always ended by disappearing suddenly, and I anticipated that you would follow the general fate. Of course I hope with all my heart, most sincerely, that you and Geraldine will be very happy together. Don't think anything of my having spoken

out my thoughts so frankly," and then she held out her hand and looked at me with a smile which had something of Geraldine about it.

Chapter VIII.

ROUND THE MULBERRY BUSH.

I HAD been engaged to Geraldine for about a week. I was intensely happy, inordinately happy, and Geraldine was the same. She said to me one day that she was afraid something would happen, that it was impossible that any two people could go on being so entirely happy without some break, without fate giving a jerk to the string by which we were tied by the heels to the prosaic ordinariness of everyday life. I took a leaf out of my future mother-in-law's book and told her it was nonsense ; I told her that all good people should be happy, and that unavoidable sorrows did not always mean unhappiness, at which she sighed and agreed with me.

Well, I went round to Eaton Terrace one morning in order to learn my lady's commands. I suggested a theatre as a suitable way of spending the evening, but Geraldine promptly vetoed that way of proceeding at once. "I cannot go to a theatre to-night, dearie," she said. "I'd love to because you know, dear, I first saw you in a theatre and I have had a tender feeling towards theatres ever since, but I cannot go to-night because I have had a letter from Mrs. Blank-Tomlinson to say that her little girl is not very well and that she cannot take charge of the 'Happy Evening' at Clerkenwell to-night. She asks me to go in her place and has sent me a wire that I might set her mind at rest. Of course, I shall have to go. I owe her several good turns."

I couldn't help looking and feeling rather blue at this, but Geraldine sidled up to me and tucked her little hand under my arm. It was not really such a little hand, you know, it was one of those slim, flexible, long-fingered hands which do not take very large gloves, but it was firm and capable enough, and there was no weakness about it. "Dear old Derry," she said,

resting her cheek against my shoulder, "don't look so blank. I don't mean to go without taking you with me."

"What! To a Happy Evening?"

"Yes, dear. Why shouldn't you enjoy a happy evening as well as anybody else?"

"But what should I have to do?"

"Oh, you will have to help me, that is all. You will enjoy it very much; it will be a new experience for you, and to tell you the truth, now that I am going away so soon, I don't want to miss any of my old occupations that I can possibly help. I have shirked such a lot for you, Derry, but I don't want to shirk this, because it is to oblige a woman who has been good to me."

"Then I will come with you. I shall enjoy it immensely," I said. And, after all, what else could I say?

I don't quite remember what else we did that day excepting that during the morning we went to Bond Street and Geraldine chose the present which I was to give her for our wedding. It was very curious, but she chose it quite unwillingly; she seemed to think it was wicked for me

to spend money upon her. But as I represented to her in the first place it would look very bad to all our friends and to everybody who noticed the accounts of our wedding if there was no present from bridegroom to bride, and, as I explained, she would be going a great deal into rather ceremonious society and a certain amount of jewelry would be as much a necessity to her as her dinner and day gowns. She eventually chose, or I did, or we arrived at a choice between us, a set of turquoise and diamond stars, which she declared was the outside limit of what her conscience would permit her to possess in that particular line. I determined, however, having once extracted from her the name of her favorite jewel, to supplement the stars by other trinkets of a similar description, but I said nothing to her about it at the time. I forget what we did during the latter part of the day, but I have a distinct recollection of her saying to me, "By the bye, you won't dress for dinner to-night, will you?" In obedience to this I went to dinner in a morning coat. I found Geraldine wearing the dark serge dress which she had worn

on the occasion of our first pilgrimage to see the little cripple girl, Emma, of the ape-like appearance. "You look very traveller-like," I said, regarding her critically.

"Yes," she replied, "I always go in a plain serge frock. One gets so pulled about."

I found that it was true enough. I may safely say that, except in the matter of scoldings or directions, from the moment we set foot in the Board School at Clerkenwell, where the Happy Evening was to be given, until we came away, I never had one word with or from Geraldine. She pointed to a bench as soon as we got in and told me to sit there and look on and that she would come presently and give me some occupation, and then she was torn away by a crowd of foreign-speaking, ill-dressed, unkempt and altogether terrible children. After a long time, I gathered that what they were speaking was a kind of English, but at first it seemed to me more like something utterly unknown—Paraguayan, or the sort of language one might expect to meet with in Central Africa.

I did *not* have a happy evening. They

were rightly called "Happy Evenings for the Poor." This one was certainly not a happy evening for the comparatively well-off Derrick Lipscombe. They were so beastly familiar, these unkempt little East-End kids. The way they pulled her here and pulled her there, and climbed on her back, and tugged at her skirts, and swirled her off among them until she was hot and bewildered and panting! I felt inclined to go and knock their heads together. The little brutes tried it on me when Geraldine came and gave me orders to arrange a game of "Oranges and Lemons." Fancy *me* playing "Oranges and Lemons"—Derrick Lipscombe! I could not help grimly wondering what my brother officers would say if they could see me—the "Old Slow Coach"—the centre of a seething mass of stuffy East-End children, all rather greasy as to the head and all hot and grubby as to the fingers, playing, if you please, "Oranges and Lemons!" Somehow, it was not a success, that particular game, and they started me of their own accord on a thing they called "The Mulberry Bush." I felt as if my life's degradation was complete,

for I washed clothes—in make-believe—and I ironed them and I mangled them, and starched them, and folded them up, and took the money, and then I baked and I sewed ; I scrubbed the floor, and I washed my face, and did all sorts of absurd and impossible things, all in imagination and to the lilt of a curious kind of a tune that was, somehow, maddeningly familiar to me. I don't think at any period of my past career that I had ever washed and baked and sewed and done other domestic duties around a mulberry bush, and yet it was all such a going back ; I caught myself once or twice wondering whether in some former existence I had been a little girl and this had been one of my favorite pastimes.

At last Geraldine shook herself free of her crowd of small adorers—and I did not wonder that they adored her, nor blamed them for doing it, for she must have been in their wretched lives like a brilliant gleam of sunshine, like a very angel from heaven ; all the same, I was still sufficiently mundane to be perfectly aware that she was exhausted and frightfully hot.

"Now you have done quite enough for to-night," I said, gripping her tightly by the arm, "and you will just sit there and get yourself cool, or you will get inflammation of the lungs, or something horrid of that kind, on the way home."

It was a very dishevelled Geraldine that turned to answer me, but the misty hazel eyes full of tenderness were still her own, and there was a softness about her smile which I had not often seen before.

"Don't grudge me to them, Derry," she said, in oh, such a tender tone; "you cannot think what this means to all these little waifs. Some of them did not know how to play when we first took them in hand, some of them had never heard of 'Oranges and Lemons' and the 'Mulberry Bush' and all the amusements that we give them."

"I don't grudge you to them," I said, rather indignantly; "but it won't do them any good if you get a serious illness through over-exertion or through getting a chill after such very violent exercise."

"No, no, dear," she said, soothingly, "but you know I have nearly come to the end of all this now. Oh, Derry, you don't

know what it is to have to give it all up—even for you.”

I looked round at the bare barrack of a room, at the panting ladies and gentlemen who were not resting from their labors, at the crowd of young savages for whom this festivity had been brought about, and I must confess that, much as I admired Geraldine for her kindness and her tenderness towards those whose lines had been cast in less pleasant places than her own, the thought occurred to me that in giving up all this for me, she would have compensations.

PART V.

Chapter 13.

WE WERE MARRIED.

WE were married just before Lent, which fell rather late that year ; indeed, it began within a week of the end of my leave. Mercifully, however, a man in the Service can always get an extension of leave to be married, possibly because it is an event which does not often arise in the same man's life. I took Geraldine abroad ; she had never travelled. I gathered that Mrs. Brodie would dearly have liked to spend every winter in some gay place on the Riviera, but Magdalen's higher aims did not include the Riviera, and Geraldine had never apparently thought of trying to brighten the lives of the poor of other coun-

tries than her own. I suppose it was very natural. One always thinks of the French peasantry, for instance, as a cheerful and contented people who are never without red wine in the cup or excellent soup in the pot; one does not realize until one has seen something of the inner life of the French poor, or read some indisputable authority on the subject, that the red wine in the cup is little better than vinegar and would certainly have a most disastrous effect upon one's own internal arrangements, and that the good soup in the pot is but too often onion broth with a slice of bread in it. I fancy that Geraldine had regarded the French poor very much as I, before my acquaintance with her, had regarded the poor but honest working-man. I have learned since I knew Geraldine that the poor but honest working-man of my more youthful imagination is quite a plutocrat by comparison with those who live and die in those parts of London spoken of familiarly by all outsiders as the East End.

We were very happy, Geraldine and I. She was so happy that for a time I think she forgot the woes of others; occasionally she

brought herself up with a jerk and said that she was living a life of selfish ease and luxury, but as she did not immediately rush off into the poorer parts of whatever town we happened to be in and try to effect a general revolution in the every-day lives of the denizens thereof, I did not find myself inconvenienced by her mild twinges of conscience ; indeed, I loved her better for them.

It was nearly Easter time before we joined the regiment and Geraldine had her first taste of regimental life. She said that she liked it, but I have always had very grave doubts upon the subject. I found when we got to the Curragh that by some means the Colonel had managed to get us put next on the roster for transference to England. It was out of all rule, it had been done by private influence, of course, and doubtless it was an utterly shameful proceeding and scandalous piece of jobbery, but Lord Ceespring was not commanding officer of the Black Horse for nothing, and what he wanted he generally succeeded in getting. He loathed being in Ireland and had left no stone unturned to

get himself taken out of it. Therefore, as we were to get our route in June, it was perfectly useless to think of setting up house for ourselves for the three months that lay between. Moreover, the Alan Dumbartons had just gone off on three months' leave, and were not returning to Ireland at all. Alan Dumbarton had contrived to break his thigh very badly over one of the dreadful Irish fences, and had been recommended a sea-trip as the best possible means of restoring his health. Lady Alan had refused to let him go without her, and I found they were perfectly willing to let us their hut, or lend it to us, which you like, we on our side undertaking to see everything packed up for transference to our next quarters. I had been very much pleased at being able to make this arrangement, for I felt that Geraldine, who had never known army people, was unaccustomed to military ways and would probably be thoroughly at sea with soldier servants—who, by the bye, are degenerating with every year, as was only to be expected when the Service was turned upside down to suit those who had never been in it and had not

the faintest idea of the requirements of either officers or men—would be not a little dismayed with the difficulties and exigencies of her new life if she found herself houseless and homeless in such a God-forgotten spot as the Curragh Camp. As it was, we sent on a couple of servants from London—a cook and a useful maid, for you cannot entertain the idea of a regular staff when you are living in camp—and, having written a great many instructions to my own fellow, I felt pretty sure that we should find everything ship-shape on our arrival. And so we did. Geraldine said it was great fun, that it was like a perpetual picnic, and she wandered in and out of the little rabbit-hutches which were dignified by the name of drawing-room, dining-room, bedroom and so on, with the delight of a surprised child; but all the same, I think those three months were a great trial to Geraldine, because it rained during most of the time, and when it was not raining it was generally blowing hard. There never was such a hut—not even in a military camp—for letting in draughts as that hut of Lady Alan's. I don't wonder that Alan Dumbarton broke

his thigh at such a convenient moment ; it was worth it.

Of course, everybody called upon us and Geraldine was made a great deal of ; but, for the first time since I had known her, she seemed to a certain extent shy, somewhat like a fish out of water. Small wonder, poor child ! You see, all the people that she knew—that we knew—had either been following the drum for the best part of their lives or else trying to keep up a position upon very inadequate means in a country which to her was little short of the backwoods. To Geraldine, to whom London was as familiar as the back of one's hand, it was very awkward to have to explain, for instance, that Chapel Street meant that particular one which runs between Grosvenor Place and Belgrave Square ; she could not tell why people looked surprised when she said, innocently enough, that she had not been to the Academy and that she never did go except to the *soirée*. Perhaps it was the strangeness of the life and the feeling that she had, so to speak, to learn to be a married woman, which kept Geraldine from even thinking of taking up

any philanthropic work while we were still in Ireland ; but she never did seem to think of it, and I began to imagine that she had put off the old fid-fads with the old London life.

We received our route in due course and left the Curragh at the end of June. Our destination was Danford. Probably a more entirely undesirable station than Danford no soldier ever found himself condemned to. I never heard of any human being who liked it. It is a busy, black, manufacturing town, all tall chimneys and moneyed people, who have neither interest in nor for the soldiers who live among them, but are most emphatically not of them. I suppose some such conversation as this took place up at headquarters. "Ceespring hates the Curragh and loathes Ireland? Says he will chuck up if he cannot be moved? Oh, nonsense! Well, let me see, pity to have Ceespring chuck up—smart soldier, Ceespring. Suppose we send him to Danford as an alternative? Rather have Ireland myself ; but some people may like Danford. Let Ceespring have the chance of comparing them."

However, I am fain to confess that the Black Horse were very well satisfied with Danford. It was comparatively near London, not being more than fifty miles from that wholly desirable harbor of refuge from *ennui*; one could get away in the early afternoon, dine and do a theatre or other festivity, and get back in the small hours of the morning. Oh, yes, in spite of its drawbacks, in spite of its chimneys and its moneyed people, Danford had its good points and its attractions.

Geraldine did not like Danford. I managed to secure a furnished house; Geraldine looked round and said she thought the Curragh hut was better. I thought myself that the house was rather pretty for a furnished house; the furniture was good, if rather heavy, and there were signs of decent occupancy about it. There were a few old china plates hanging up here and there, and some portraits of the family order, which lent an air of respectability to the establishment. Geraldine sniffed. Yes, I am bound to confess that Geraldine distinctly sniffed; she said it was lodging-housey. However, she added very prettily that she

really did not care what sort of roof covered her, nor what sort of house decorations greeted us morning, noon, and night, so long as we were together; and then she asked me, in a casual kind of way, what sort of rooms the women and children had. I told her I did not know. "Bless you, child," I answered, "I have not the smallest idea what kind of rooms they have."

"But I thought you inspected them every week."

"Well, that pleasant duty belongs to the Colonel," I replied; "he goes round on Sunday mornings and inspects the married quarters. I don't happen to have been on duty on a Sunday yet, so I really don't know anything about it."

"But, Derry," she said, "you ought to take an interest in the married quarters."

"I don't see why."

"Well, it is so bad for the married people to feel their officers do not take an interest in them. I can't understand men in a position of authority not doing their work thoroughly. It seems to me the greatest drawback of a soldier's character is that he

does not live his life with any degree of earnestness."

"Well, my dear, that is true to a certain extent," I admitted, "but at the same time you mustn't forget that a soldier doesn't want to be soldiering all the time. He has got to soldier jolly hard if he gets a spell of active service, and besides that, he has to run the risk of ending his career at a moment's notice."

"We have all got to run that risk every day of our lives, dearie."

"Oh, yes, but you don't in your ordinary life here run the risk of a man on active service, you will admit that?" She did admit it, and I continued, "I think we may take it that the soldier who gets a spell of active service compresses all his earnestness into a very short space of time—all the necessary earnestness. You can't go on being earnest all the time, you know."

"I suppose not," she said, with a sigh. "But, Derry, I am very happy, you know. Don't think, dear, that I am not happy, because ever since we were married I seem to have lived in a dream of selfish indulgence, but I am beginning to find my life so empty.

You go out in the morning and I go down and interview the cook—I never did like interviewing cooks and I don't like interviewing this one at all. I ask her what she is going to give us for lunch and she hands me a slate on which she has got lunch planned out very much better than I could plan it out for myself; then I ask her what she is going to give us for dinner and she turns over the slate to the other side and shows me the dinner programme written out on that. You know, Derry, there is nothing ennobling or satisfying or elevating about a cook's kitchen slate."

"No, my child, but there is something very elevating and ennobling and satisfying about the cook's lunch and dinner."

"Yes, yes, but my part of that only takes five minutes. She asked me the first morning and the second morning if I would like to look over her pantry; she asked me with an air which showed me very plainly that if I accepted her offer, my place as her mistress wouldn't be worth a day's notice. I daresay I ought to have looked at her pantries, but I didn't."

"I don't see why you should possess a

good cook and go and worry yourself over things for which she is responsible, and which she manages very well; it's no use paying for a dog and barking yourself."

"Well, that's what I feel, Derry," said my little wife, looking at me in a wistful manner; "but after you have gone and I have interviewed cook, I have absolutely nothing to do. I go upstairs, I talk a little to Louise, tell her where I am going during the day, what I am going to wear, hear if she has any suggestions for the improvement of my clothes, and in twenty minutes I am through again, and then I have got all the long day before me until you come back in the afternoon—unless you come back to lunch, which is not every day."

"True. Well, why don't you go out?"

"I do go out. I walk about these dingy streets, I meet all the people coming out from the mills and they pass remarks about my clothes and behave as no people in the East End ever dream of behaving, and then I go into some shop and buy things I don't want. Oh, dear, I must have some interest in my life, I must take up some new work,

I must—by the bye, didn't you say I might visit among the married women ? ”

“ Of course you can ; the married women will be delighted to see you, particularly if you go in their washing time.”

“ What do you mean by washing time ? ”

“ Well, I suppose married women have washing to do at some time or other, I know I have often smelt soap-suds in various parts of the barracks.”

“ Well, I think I shall make a start. I think I shall look into the condition of the children.”

“ You will find them all at school, my dear.”

“ Ah, so I shall. I think, dearie, I must look up the married quarters and then I shall hear something about the poor souls who are not on the strength of the regiment.”

Chapter 3.

MRS. BRODIE'S FIRST VISIT.

I DON'T know how Geraldine managed it, but almost before I realized that she was contemplating making a sort of predatory excursion among the wives and children of the Black Horse, she had revolutionized that portion of the regiment. If I could only have looked forward, if I could only have foreseen what was about to happen, I think I would have given up the house and taken one in London and have spent a few hours with Geraldine when I could ; but there I was in Danford for at least two years, committed to the house we were occupying for the time that the regiment remained in the garrison, and Geraldine was bored to death. Almost before I knew where I was, Geraldine had taken to her old ways, and when Mrs.

Brodie came down to pay us her first visit—which I may say she did not do until it was a convenient time for leaving London, that is to say, the end of July—I had positively no soul of my own ; I had no comfort in my life, I mean, from Geraldine's society, and I had learned to understand Mrs. Brodie as surely no son-in-law ever understood his wife's mother in all this world before.

Mrs. Brodie arrived one afternoon about four o'clock. I went to meet her at the station, taking along with me the Stanhope and pair in which I generally drove Geraldine. "My dear boy," she said, "I am very pleased to find myself out of that horrid, hot, disagreeable, dingy London. Much as I love London, and greatly as I value my house in Eaton Terrace, London at this time of year is very dreadful. And I have left Magdalen harder at work than ever."

"And what is the latest occupation of Magdalen's mind?" I inquired.

"That is rather more than I feel in a position to tell you," said Mrs. Brodie mysteriously, "except that it has something

to do with women voting in Parliament. Magdalen's views have changed on that point. She now thinks that married women ought not to vote in Parliament, but that the unmarried ones ought. Magdalen thinks that I, being a married woman, or having been a married woman, am not entitled to vote, although I am a householder, but she thinks that as what she is pleased to call 'my lodger' *she* has every right to vote. I do not argue the point," Mrs. Brodie went on, "I have long since given up arguing with Magdalen, but I have my thoughts, though, true, I mostly keep them to myself, which, perhaps, under the circumstances, is just as well. And how is Geraldine? Why did she not come to the station to meet me?"

"Well, Geraldine is——"

"I hope she is well?"

"Oh, yes, Geraldine is very well, very well indeed. No, she was very sorry she couldn't come to meet you, Mrs. Brodie, but she has something on."

"Something social?" said Mrs. Brodie, scenting a bit of gayety like a war-horse scenting the battle from afar.

"No, there is not much in the way of gayety going on at present except a few outside garden parties and a few very slow dinners. No, Geraldine has taken to slumming again."

"My dear boy," said Mrs. Brodie, looking at me with big reproachful eyes.

"I couldn't help it, Mrs. Brodie," I replied, "I really couldn't help it, it wasn't my fault at all. The fact is, whilst we were in Ireland she never thought of anything philanthropic at all; but when she came here and found little or no society—none that is congenial—she began to yearn for something to do."

"My dear boy, she has got her house to look after."

"Well, yes, there is that; but unfortunately we have got a very efficient cook who doesn't like to be interfered with; the other servants are also very good—they do not want supervision; in fact, they know much more about housekeeping than Geraldine does."

"I always told Geraldine," said Mrs. Brodie, "that when she came to be married she would find herself at sea, but never did

I think I should hear that good servants were not an unmixed blessing. And what has she taken up now?"

"Well, she has taken up the women and children, those belonging to the regiment, I mean; as far as I can tell they are getting a very fine time, of course, and Geraldine seems very much happier."

"Surely *you* are sufficient to make Geraldine happy?" said my mother-in-law, looking at me with wide-eyed astonishment.

"I thought that I was," I said rather lamely; "but, of course, as Geraldine herself says, I have got my regular work and that interests me and, so to speak, keeps me fresh, whereas she has absolutely nothing to do when I am out of the road, which I am during the whole of the morning and very frequently a good part of the afternoon, and every now and again for the whole of the day. Of course, you know, Mrs. Brodie, when a chap hasn't got his troop it *is* dull for his wife the days that he is on duty."

"Oh, yes, that's all very well. And what is she doing this afternoon?"

"I really don't know, but she told me she would be there when you got in."

We were even then fast approaching the house, which was situated in a village about a mile from the town. Geraldine herself, looking prettier than ever, and wearing a light, dainty summer gown, was standing at the drive gate shading her eyes that she might the sooner see us approaching. As I drew up she ran forward, waving her hands and greeting her mother with many smiles and expressions of affection. Mrs. Brodie was so pleased at this demonstration that she quite forgot to ask, for some little time, why her daughter had not gone to the station to meet her.

"I am afraid, you know, dear mother," said Geraldine, when Mrs. Brodie had refused another cup of tea, "I am afraid that you will find Danford dreadfully dull after your gay society life in London. You know there is nothing to do here in a society way; there really are no people—at least, only a very few, and they are all a long distance apart from each other."

"But all those large houses that I noticed as we came along?" asked Mrs. Brodie.

"Well, dear, of course there are people in them and of course they called on us, but

I don't think that you will find them particularly interesting, really I don't. Of course, they do give dinners—rather slow and heavy, put the dishes on the table, you know—and some of them are a little doubtful about their *k*'s. I don't think you will care about them. There are about half a dozen families that you will like, and there are one or two invitations for garden parties, and there is a dinner at Lady Trevenion's next week, but I am afraid on the whole you will find Danford rather dull."

"That means that you find it rather dull," said Mrs. Brodie, looking at Geraldine with mischief in her blue eyes. "Derry tells me that you have taken up your fid-fads again."

"No, not exactly. I am doing a little visiting among the women and children, but then every officer's wife ought to do that."

"Does Lady Ceespring do it?"

"Well, in a sort of a way she does. She gives a treat at Christmas always, and she gives prizes at certain times, but Lord Ceespring doesn't like her to take up much active work. You see, she has ever so

many small children—four or five—and she is a delicate kind of woman, and Lord Ceespring thinks she ought to be wrapped in cotton-wool and all that sort of thing ; but I find her very ready to help me in any way that I like so long as she has no personal trouble with it.”

“ Oh, yes. And all the other ladies ? ”

“ Well, there is Lady Staunton, she is Lady Ceespring's cousin, you know.”

“ Yes.”

“ She doesn't do very much.”

“ Oh, is she delicate ? ”

“ No, she isn't a bit delicate, and they have only one child, but she says she never has time. She says, ‘ Well, the fact is Tony wants me always, and Tony gets mad if I have got a lot of outside interests, and I don't like poor people, I never know what to say to them ; they don't interest me and I don't interest them, and we're very poor, we haven't got any money to spare—we haven't got enough for ourselves—and I never did do that kind of work, and I don't see why I should begin it now ! ’ ”

“ What a sensible woman ! ” said Mrs. Brodie.

"Well, it may be sensible, mother," said Geraldine, a little stiffly, "but such sensibleness is exceedingly selfish."

"Which of course you told her," said Mrs. Brodie.

"No, I didn't tell her; it's no use making bad blood for oneself and one's husband, but I thought it and I told Derrick so."

"So you did—so you did," I put in.

"Yes—I must say, I don't think it nice of Lady Staunton. However, they are all very pleased for me to do anything I like in that way and, after all, that is something, isn't it?"

"Oh, it is, my dear. Why, you have the field to yourself."

"I would rather not have any field to myself," said Geraldine, indignantly. "No one person can possibly work any philanthropic scheme thoroughly."

"No, my dear, I daresay not; but you will get all the credit and glory."

"I want no credit and glory," said Geraldine, "I want that part of my life filled up which Derry is not able to fill."

"And what have you been doing this afternoon?" Mrs. Brodie asked.

"Oh, this afternoon? I had some of the children to tea. I had asked them before I knew that you were coming. It is their half-holiday, you know, and it is a great treat for them to come and play in the garden here. I sent them off an hour earlier because I felt that they would bore you a little, and when I have them again I thought I would get Derry to take you on an excursion or to go and see somebody really nice, because I know you don't like poor children, and of course I don't want to inflict them on you."

"Oh, very well, very well; if Derry will take me I shall be only too delighted to go."

"Well, you see," said Geraldine, "they only have an afternoon a week."

I sat up—bolt upright, in fact—in my chair and put down the newspaper which I had been pretending to read. "I say, Geraldine," I asked in what I am afraid must have sounded rather a blank tone, "you don't mean that you are going to have the barrack children to tea every week, do you?"

"Dear Derry," she said, "not quite that,

but every week during the very hot weather—during August and September. You see, this is the last Saturday in July.”

“You are going to have the children to tea every week for two months?”

“Yes, I thought about it.”

“The whole lot?”

“Well, not quite the whole lot, only those in barracks, dear.”

“Then, when are you going to have those out of barracks?”

“Well—well—the fact is, Derry,” said Geraldine, stammering a little, “I have not quite arranged for that. I was just thinking it out. How would you advise me to manage it?”

PART VI.

Chapter XI.

A BIT OF A DILEMMA

THAT evening, when we were dressing for dinner, Geraldine came into my room. "Derry," she said, in an apologetic tone, which made me feel as if a greater brute than myself did not exist, "I wanted to ask you something?"

"Yes, dear, yes?"

"Well, Derry, I am afraid I rather surprised you about the children. You know, dear, I quite thought that you had left me a free hand in what I should do."

"My dear child, I never raised any objections; you are mistress of the house, you can do as you like."

"Well, Derry, that is kind and sweet and good of you, it really is; but you know, dear, I wouldn't do anything that you didn't like not for the world, you know I wouldn't."

"Of course, you wouldn't; who ever said you would?"

"No, I did not quite mean that; but about these children, do you really mind my having them?"

"No, of course not. Why should I mind your having a few children to tea if it pleases you? What pleases you pleases me. Of course, I am afraid, you know, you will find that it is a great tax on you after a while, that's all."

"Oh, no, Derry, I shan't feel that. You don't know how happy it makes me to give pleasure to those who have no pleasure in their lives as I have, and if you really don't mind I should like to go on with it. Poor little things, I don't think, from all I hear, that they have so much of a time, although Lady Ceespring does give a little treat once a year or so."

"No, my dear, I don't suppose that they do. I have always said all my life that the

lot of a married private soldier is the hardest to be met with anywhere, only outsiders will not believe one. I told you you would find more than sufficient scope."

"Oh, yes, dear; and as long as you leave me a free hand, I know I shall have plenty of scope. You have made me so happy, Derry."

"You will only remember one thing, Geraldine," I said, "that we have not an unlimited income and that there are places to stop at even in spending money to make others happy."

"Oh, I will be most careful, Derry. This really costs next to nothing, because you see cook is very good, she makes all the cakes herself, and they have tea in the coach-house with quite common mugs and things, so they won't cost much. I have been too well accustomed to doing things for the London poor to be wasteful."

"Yes, dear, yes. I was not reproaching you, I only made a suggestion."

"I am sure you are very good, you are far too good for me," she said, "you are a great deal too good for me."

"Well, we won't say anything about that

—perhaps I am, perhaps I am not, perhaps we are too good for each other, but we will hope not, at all events. By the bye, you are going to confine your ministrations to the children, are you ?”

She looked at me doubtfully. “ Well, Derry, dear boy, I found out that the married women, even when they are on the strength, which sounds so desirable—oh, they do have such a bad time !”

“ I am afraid they do, yes, I am sure of it. They get taken by the dash and glitter, and faith ! the dash and glitter have to stand them in good stead, for they get little else out of soldiering. The fact is, Geraldine, soldiering is a great deal overdone, it is a sort of wind-bag ; all the glory goes to some howling old swell that is lucky up at headquarters. But you are not going to take up the entire cause of the married women, are you ?”

“ No, dear, I wasn't going to. I did think I would start—they seem so thriftless, Derry, and I did think I would start a sort of mothers' class. You see, dear boy, mother has—my mother, I mean—has upset all my calculations. She said she was

going to Homburg, and that she was not coming here until quite late in the season—towards Christmas, in fact; then she suddenly comes at almost a moment's notice, and I am afraid she will be rather upset at the engagements I have made, thinking she wasn't coming at all."

"What engagements have you made?"

"Well, I was going to have my first mothers' meeting to-morrow evening."

"My dear girl, you are surely not going to take away my evenings from me?"

"No, Derry, only one now and again, dear. You know you do dine at mess sometimes."

"What? Are you going to bundle me out to dine at mess at stated periods?"

"I am not going to bundle you out at all, Derry. You say things in such an unkind way—it's all mother's coming!"

"Let me hear the worst," I said desperately.

"I was going to have the first meeting to-morrow evening."

"Oh—h! And what am I going to do with your mother? Are you going to have meetings every evening?" I asked gloomily.

"No, dear. I can't have them otherwise than in the evening because, you see, poor things, they can't get away; they have got their work to do and of course they can't leave it."

"No, exactly. I have got my work to do in the morning which I can't leave; but I think it is rather rough luck I should be docked in the evenings, isn't it?"

"Oh, Derry, don't say that, you will make me so unhappy if you do; and it seems that Lady Edward Cossiter used to have a mothers' meeting and she used to help them to sew all the children's clothes, you know, and so on, and they have missed it dreadfully ever since she went away, but nobody has seemed to take it up in her place. I wonder she didn't make arrangements for it, but I suppose they left in a hurry. But you see I have promised the poor things, and I can't go back from my word. And they are so grateful, you can't think."

"Oh, you must keep your promise, of course—oh, you must do that; but what I want to know is, what is to become of me?"

"Well, dear, it is only now and again."

"And how are you going to teach them to sew things? You don't know anything about sewing."

"Well, I don't know very much, that is quite true," Geraldine admitted, with charming frankness; "but it is never too late to learn, and you see I can use Louise."

"You will have to raise Louise's wages."

"Oh, no, of course I shall not; Louise will be very happy to do it to please me."

"Oh, will she? Oh, that's all right then. What am I to do with your mother?"

"Well, that is what I have been asking myself all day. I can't think what you are to do with my mother."

"Are you going to have dinner any earlier?"

"Yes, dear, I must, or later."

"What time do these wretched creatures come?"

"Oh, they are coming about six o'clock."

"Six o'clock? Then we had better have dinner later. How long are you going on?"

"Only for about three hours."

"Do you mean to say you are going to have those wretched women sitting here for three hours after they have been working hard all day?"

"Well, dear, not exactly that. They will have tea and there will be a little gossip, you know, and the babies——"

"You mean to say they are going to bring the babies?"

"Well, yes, Derrick, they can't leave the babies alone at home."

"Do you mean to say my house is going to be turned into a crèche?"

"No, Derry, of course not; but Lady Edward used to do that kind of thing, they say she did used to have a crèche—well, if you like to put it in that way."

"H'm—Edward Cossiter might well leave the regiment and get out of the Service! He took to yachting, didn't he? Sensible chap! I always thought Edward Cossiter a sensible chap. You can't slum off a yacht very well."

"I hope you won't want to take me yachting," said Geraldine, "because I am a wretched sailor."

"You are a wretched sailor? By Jove, then that's barred to me. Well, my dearest, if it will please you to turn the house into a refuge for the destitute or those that are not destitute, you must do it; but I do wish you had not begun just when your mother has come to pay her first visit to us, because your mother is a very amusing and clever woman and she will say comic things at which I shall not be able to help laughing. I don't like the idea of having comic things said about my wife, I object to it very strongly, but I shall certainly laugh, I shall not be able to help myself, and if I do, Geraldine, you must really make excuses for me and feel that you have brought it upon yourself. You know, dearest, that I would not do anything to annoy you or slight you for the world; but it really is unfortunate that you should have begun this just when your mother is paying us her first visit."

"It is very unfortunate that my mother should be paying us her first visit just when I had carefully arranged everything so that the two should not clash," said Geraldine, rather sharply.

"Well, yes, looked at from your point of view that is so. The question is, what am I to do with your mother to-morrow night?"

"I don't know," said Geraldine desperately.

"We had better have dinner at nine o'clock, hadn't we? Couldn't I take the mother for a long drive—oh, let me see now, there's that pretty show-place at the Waterfall, couldn't I take her there to tea?"

"Derry, you are an angel," said Geraldine impulsively. "Some men," she said, looking at me reflectively, "would have been vexed."

The idea crossed my mind that some men would have been *mad*, but, after all, when I looked at Geraldine's sweet and trusting eyes—when I realized how good she was, how unselfish she was, how she thought always of others before herself—when I remembered that her chiefest pleasure in life lay in trying to brighten the dull and sad lives of others, I could not help feeling that the wife I had married was really much too good for me. Compared to her,

I was a clod, a creature of clay; I was a man without a soul. And to think that I should be Geraldine's husband. It was wonderful !

Chapter III.

PROGRESS.

ON the whole Mrs. Brodie's visit got over better than one might have expected. She was a very worldly woman, yet although it is more or less the fashion to speak of worldliness as an undesirable characteristic, I do not know if those who can be called such are not the easiest people with whom one is brought in contact in this vale of tears. She had the knack of making herself all things to all men, and such persons, especially when they are feminine, are much easier to get on with than the unfortunate beings who can only exist in one set and are like fish out of water directly they are brought in touch with other interests than their own immediate ones.

It is the same all the world over. Take

your exclusive aristocrat who feels and says—in print, if she has got the chance—that people may be clever or brilliant or rich or as wonderful as you please, but if they do not happen to have been born “one of us” they may be with us but they can never be of us, put these exclusive persons into a smart Bohemian set and see how deadly dull they will be. Take your Bohemian and put him down into a roomful of titles, ten chances to one that he too will be as dull as ditch-water; take your earnest-minded young woman who can get up and make speeches on a dozen topics at a moment’s notice—aye, and good speeches, too—and set her down in a company of gay young girls who want to talk over the last ball and their pet partners—see how she is out of it; take your gay young girl and set her down in some modern club devoted to the advancement of women and see what will happen to her. It is the same all the world over; but there are a few, the worldly of the worldly, who seem, to use an American expression, like “greased lightning.” I don’t mean in the sense of weakness, but in the sense of being able to fit in anywhere and to slip in anywhere with-

out once knowing how or why they do it. Mrs. Brodie was one of these. I am convinced that if she had been taken up and in the twinkling of an eye transferred into an Eastern zenana, she would have comported herself in the most approved fashion and would have made the dusky beauties feel that she was quite a model for them in all their most intricate accomplishments. I always feel that if Mrs. Brodie had been suddenly invited to tea with the Empress of China she would have suited her manners perfectly to the occasion and created an excellent impression of the manners of Englishwomen, for I never saw her look at all out of it yet. She chose to be out of it when she was discussing Magdalen's fid-fads, but I never could help feeling that she really knew much more on Magdalen's subjects than Magdalen herself did. So, though fresh from the varied joys of a London season, she made herself feel at home both in the Black Horse and in the delectable town of Danford, and really, judging from the unrestrained air of innocent enjoyment with which she went through the various terrible, not to say ghastly dinners to which

she accompanied us, one might have been forgiven for thinking that she had never known entertainments of a more exhilarating or fashionable character.

She ruffled Geraldine very little. "By and by," she said to me graciously, "Geraldine won't have so much time on her hands; she will have other things to do and, it is to be hoped, a larger household of her own to look after; and then, you know, my dear boy, you have always this consolation that she never can get too utterly drawn into local matters, for you cannot rush headlong into that kind of work in a new place, and by the time she has got herself established you will get your orders to move on. Most convenient! I have often wished that I could move on to another London in which there were no 'Happy Evenings' and no fads."

"But you see we are taking our 'Happy Afternoons' with us, Mrs. Brodie, because at present Geraldine is confining herself entirely to the necessities of the women and children in the regiment."

"Well, my dear," she said, with a kind of sigh, "you don't seem to mind, and I am

sure I need not mind for you. You have advantages over me in that of necessity Geraldine spends a good deal of time with you and is content to do so, and I had advantages over you in that Geraldine did go out to her fid-fads—she did not bring her fid-fads into the house. That, I never could have stood.”

“Geraldine and I get on very well together,” I said, and I laughed a little to myself at putting my very deep love for my wife in such ordinary and prosaic language.

As the autumn, went over, I grew to love Geraldine more and more for the very fid-fads which had so worried and irritated her mother. It was only reasonable that a young woman who had been so active in her girlhood should wish to fill up her life with some work of utility. After all, we had a very big garden, and it did not hurt me if Geraldine chose to have the barrack children up now and then to enjoy a tea and an hour or two of innocent fun. They were rather nice children, you know, children brought up with a proper idea of keeping their place, and sometimes of a Saturday afternoon the other ladies would come in,

and they all were so sweet and nice to Geraldine, saying how wonderfully kind and good of her it was to take all this work and help to give the youngsters a good time. Lady Ceespring, for instance, came in pretty often, certainly oftener than she would have done if Geraldine had been quite an ordinary little society woman. "Dear Mrs. Lipscombe," she said to her one day, "I do think it is so sweet of you, and Marcus is perfectly rapturous about you, he is really."

She evidently thought that for the Colonel to be rapturous about her, and by being so to set the hall-mark of his approval upon her, was the highest form of compliment which he or any one else could possibly pay. "It is the kind of work," she went on sweetly, "which I should love to do, but I am not very strong and Marcus does object so much to my taxing myself in that way, that I never do anything that will worry him; but at the same time you must be sure to let me help you in anything that you have on hand—I mean with money, or the children's clothes, or anything that you think is necessary, because,

you know, Mrs. Lipscombe, you are so sensible, you understand these poor dear people, don't you?"

"Well, perhaps I do," said Geraldine with a gleam of humor in her laughing eyes, "they are not very difficult to understand, and it is no credit to me to do a little thing like this, because I have always been used to what Derrick calls 'slumming.' I used to work very hard when I was a girl in London, but I have not done much since I was married; and, of course, here to-day and gone to-morrow, it's no use taking up schemes which one would have to lay aside at a moment's notice; so that by helping the women and children a little I just keep my hand in and it gives me something to think of when Derrick is away. And you know, Lady Ceespring," she went on ingenuously, "it isn't all beer and skittles being a subaltern's wife. Of course *you* don't understand what it is to be left half the day without your husband, or all the day from seven in the morning—seven in the morning?—well, six in the morning I mean—till eleven at night, and take it as a favor if he comes back then."

"My dear," said Lady Ceespring gently, "my husband was only a subaltern when we were married."

"Oh, is that so?"

"Certainly he was. I know just what it is, but of course I had my cousin Laura, who was married about the same time I was, so that I never was quite stranded and thrown on my own resources as you must be. But, I do think it is so sweet and good of you to try to help those who are less happily placed than yourself, I do indeed. By the bye," she went on, "I have brought you some sweets this afternoon as a little surprise for the children. They are in the carriage, or perhaps your man put them in the hall?"

"Yes, I think he did." Our faithful James had put them into the hall and at Geraldine's request I went out and fetched them. They were mixed sweets, and I think Lady Ceespring had bought them by the stone, but they were as nothing among the crowd of young cormorants who swarmed round Geraldine as soon as she appeared on the drawing-room veranda. She handed them all out and then she put

up her hand just as I had seen her do on that memorable evening in Clerkenwell when I had played that game about the mulberry bush. "Now, children," she called out, "what do you say to her ladyship for these?"

It was a very respectable cheer which rang out in response to this hint, a cheer that was half a cheer and half a shriek. You know how little girls cry "Hip, hip, hurrah!" don't you? Something in the same way as they try to throw a cricket ball, but the effect upon Lady Ceespring was wholly unexpected, for when I turned to speak to her, I saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

It was not very long after this that Geraldine got bitten with a new idea. She conceived the notion of getting up an entertainment for the children. Now the children of the Black Horse had had entertainments got up for them before, but they were entertainments in which they had sat still in the front seats and ate oranges while somebody else did the entertaining part of the business. That was not Geraldine's idea, Geraldine's idea was to let

the children do the entertaining and for the grown-up portion of the regiment to sit in the front seats and applaud, if not eat oranges. She first mooted the notion to Lady Ceespring, who said it was quite a lovely idea, that she should allow her children to sit up especially for the occasion. The young Orfords had a good deal of license in that way and not infrequently had enjoyed similar indulgences, but this was the wildest and boldest flight which the old Black Horse had ever indulged in, for Geraldine's ambitions ran to getting up a pantomime. I never thought that the day would come when I should be so profoundly sorry for myself as almost to wish that I had never known the storm and stress of this life, but that was what I came to when Geraldine's pantomime was in progress. I lived to the tune of a pantomime. I got up with it in the morning, it slept with me all night ; I had a perfectly awful time. It cost me nothing—well, Geraldine gave a trifle out of her allowance, which of course would not reasonably count—so that I could not grumble at that. I really don't know where she got the money from,

but certainly she did not come to me for it, yet the whole regiment was pervaded with one atmosphere of pantomime—pantomime done by the children of the regiment. It was in every paper that one took up, it was in every mouth, on every tongue, it went on for weeks. There was not an officer with the smallest pretension to even a superficial knowledge of the footlights who was not pressed into the service, there was not a child of the most average intelligence who was not found a part, and the hardest of all was that the Ceesprings encouraged her in it. Such a hammering and carpentering going on, such a stitching and arranging! We never had a meal without Louise coming to ask some questions about Ali Baba's dress, or Fatima's dress, or the dress of the Babes in the Wood, and I certainly never went through a single day for many weeks that I did not run against Geraldine in some part of the barracks, or that I did not receive an agonized note or message from her on some question of vital importance which was perfectly impossible for me to settle. And as the scheme throve and grew apace so did the ambitions of Geraldine, aided

and abetted by Lady Ceespring and encouraged by two young fools who had not been very long joined and who might have known better, grow and thrive apace likewise. From an invitation entertainment given in a spare troop room this bevy of conspirators passed on to more elaborate plans. They started, if you please, an idea that they would give a great Christmas treat to the children of the Black Horse whose parents were not on the strength of the regiment, and before one could say "Jack Robinson!" there were bills out announcing a bespeak night for the Mayor and Corporation, another for the nobility and gentry of the neighborhood. The proceeds of both evenings' entertainments to be devoted to a Christmas tree for the children of the regiment.

I could not help offering Geraldine a little mild remonstrance. "Hadn't you better," I said, "have a more extended field of operations? Don't you think if we were to take the theatre itself—it would cost a mere trifle—that we might all make our fortunes?"

"No, I don't think so," said Geraldine,

taking me quite seriously, "we shall find three nights quite as much as we can manage. You see, there is the officers' bespeak, that is to be an invitation thing, then there is the Mayor's bespeak and the fashionable bespeak. I would rather have three successes," she went on, as seriously as if she were discussing some Court function, "than have it dragged out over a week and have a falling off in the end."

I said nothing, but I felt that I should be profoundly thankful when Ali Baba had gone into the limbo of past pantomimes.

PART VII.

Chapter XXXI.

A REGIMENTAL PANTOMIME.

I NEVER could keep a secret, and now that I am setting out for the first time in my life to put down faithfully what happened concerning Geraldine's first attempt at stage management, I cannot try the *hocus pocus* dodge of keeping my readers in suspense. The pantomime was a hideous failure.

It began at seven o'clock. We all went, looking very brave in our mess dress; all the ladies were there, Lady Ceespring glittering with many diamonds, and Lady Staunton wearing the family sapphires. Everything was beautifully done. There were programmes handed

about by such children as were too stupid or too numerous to be included in the cast, and there was even a bouquet, with a paper edge, which was presented to Lady Ceespring by a very small child in a very big blue sash. I think the child belonged to the Provost Sergeant, but I am not quite sure. Then there were all the proud mothers with many attendant babies, and there were the mothers and children not on the strength of the regiment, and as many long-legged dragoons as could be packed into the somewhat limited space which had been left at the disposal of the Accommodation Committee. It was really very complete. There was the anxious author, a dashing young corporal who had been on the stage in his gay and giddy youth and had enlisted nobody knew why, there was the string band of the regiment, which made an orchestra by no means to be sniffed at, there was a prompter and a lime-light man and all the necessary adjuncts, and last but not least, there was the cast. It is safe to say that not one child was word-perfect, not one child but had stage-fright. Those who

had stage-fright, who had what I believe is technically called "dried up," never attempted anything so elaborate as gagging, but gazed helplessly in the direction of the prompter's box, and the voice of the prompter rose on the stilly air—hushed indeed to a painful stillness—first in an encouraging little hint, then with a broader one, finally with a bold but undramatic rendering of the missing lines. Those of the cast who did remember their parts, rendered them with a monotony which was excruciating; not a child but delivered its words—unless it forgot them—with a sameness of intonation which rendered it absolutely impossible for anybody beyond the second row of the reserved seats to glean the faintest idea of what was going on. Of all the cast not one remembered its gestures. They all came on with painfully thin legs, arms hanging straight down, eyes well fixed on the auditorium; it was an agonizing, ludicrous exhibition, and at the end of the fourth act, I heard Lester Brookes, who was sitting just behind me, say to another of the fellows, "I remember when Marcus Orford was a gay young

subaltern, as big a dare-devil as ever breathed, that he was fond of saying that it was a thousand pities a man ever got a command. He used to quote Urquhart as the smartest, brightest, most headlong dare-devil in the whole of the British Service, and then he would shake his head and bewail his having got the command and adopted a heavy-father style of manner; but just look at poor old Marcus Orford now, stuck up there in the front row with a youngster on either side of him, twirling his moustache and trying to make out what these poor little devils on the boards are talking about. 'Pon my word, I think Urquhart's memory is revenged !”

I confess that I sympathized with Lester Brookes for his regret of the bygone Marcus Orford, and equally did I admire the imperturbability of our commanding officer in gravely sitting out such an entirely ludicrous performance. The reply to his remarks was not altogether so palatable to me. “If ever I get married,” said the youngster to whom he had spoken, “I shall stop my wife from having anything to do with the regiment. I knew an old par-

son once who never allowed his women folk to mix themselves up in any way with what he called 'parishing.' 'You don't parish for the love of it,' he used to say, 'you parish for the chance of making up to the curates,' and by Jove, it's very much the same with these married ladies."

I should have been angry if it had not been so absurd; as it was I was only disgusted to think that Geraldine's kindness and single-heartedness could have been so entirely misconstrued. The idea of Geraldine making up to a young puppy like Danvers! It was sickening. The awful part of the whole thing was that every seat was booked for both nights which were to follow our own bespeak; and when the thing came to an end, all the fathers cheered and all the mothers cheered, and Lady Ceespring clapped her hands and nodded her head approvingly, and the Colonel clapped in his best heavy-father style, and they called for the author, and they called for the stage manageress, and they called for the cast, and the whole thing went off in a perfect blaze of fireworks. I felt absolutely sick with the shame and disgust of a plain,

unvarnished and truthful realization of the general hideousness of the entire performance.

"My dear Geraldine," I said, when we got into the brougham to go home, "what are you going to do to-morrow night?"

"Oh, my dear boy, *do*? Why just the same as we did to-night, only better. How glad I am that it went off without a hitch; it was perfect."

"You don't mean to say you are going to have the Mayor and all those Corporation Johnnies to pay money for and sit out such a ghastly show as you had to-night?"

"Why, Derry," she said, in an astonished tone—and by the light cast by the lamps outside, I saw that she turned and looked at me with blank and utter surprise—"why, Derry, it was a great success."

"Oh, Lord!" I ejaculated. "Well, if that is what you call a success, what would you call a failure?"

"A failure? Why, dear, if the curtain had not gone up, or the people had hissed, or if any real *contretemps* had happened; but as it was, everything went off beautifully."

I gave it up. "You won't expect me to come to-morrow night, will you?"

"Indeed I shall. Why, it would be an insult to me if you did not."

"Well, if you put it in that way, of course I must."

"But, dear Derry, do you mean to say you were not pleased?"

"Pleased?" I said. "No, I wasn't pleased! I am going home to wash my face in strong soda and water and see if I can get the blushes out of it."

"Oh, Derry, you are too bad! When you think what little dots they are—the eldest one not quite twelve—it was a most creditable performance. I am sure the Colonel clapped quite heartily, and we never expected him to do anything of the kind, and Lady Ceespring was delighted, she sent me a message to say so."

"Lady Ceespring is a very good-natured woman," I said grimly; "but you won't find the Corporation Johnnies who have paid their money, for a regimental charity too, to be quite so accommodating as Lady Ceespring in her position of colonel's wife. However, thank goodness I am not respon-

sible ! I have got nothing to do with it, but you would perhaps like to know what Danvers said about it." And then I retailed the conversation which I had overheard between Lester Brookes and young Danvers.

Geraldine's comment was simple, terse, but expressive. "Nasty little beast !" she said, as if there was nothing more to say upon such a subject ; then she leaned forward and gave me a piece of information. "I never told you anything about it, Derry," she said, leaning her cheek against my almost unwilling shoulder ; "but it isn't very long since that little beast took it into his head to get rather spoony on me. He tried on squeezing my fingers and telling me it was a red-letter day because he had seen me, and because I didn't think him worth snubbing he tried——"

"What ?"

"Well, he tried to kiss me, Derrick."

"Danvers ?"

"Yes, Danvers. Nasty little beast !"

I sat upright, too. "By Jove, I'll wring his neck for him !" I burst out.

But Geraldine laughed. "Oh, my dear

boy," she said, with a gay little laugh, "you wouldn't take the trouble to wring the neck of a little beast like that! It is quite unnecessary, too, because I told him that I only cared for men to kiss me, that I never had had a taste for little boys."

"You told Danvers that?"

"Yes, I did; he is a little boy."

"He is three-and-twenty."

"Three-and-twenty? Mr. Danvers? Nasty little beast!"

Perhaps, looked at from Geraldine's point of view, the entire entertainment was an unqualified success. Of course, when you come to think of it, when you come to reckon up the hopelessly bad material with which she had had to work, and the fact that the show had been got through without any serious hitch, it was more or less creditable. And no one else had suffered as I did, for I had the feeling that she, who was nearest and dearest in all the world to me, was responsible for the entire entertainment. Anyway, as it was impossible to put Geraldine out of conceit with her night's work, and as I did not forget that it would be undesirable to take the

heart out of her, I bottled up for that any further expressions of what I felt and awaited, in fear and trembling events which would happen on the following evenings.

Chapter XIV.**A FORESHADOWING.**

I THINK on the whole that the pantomime was worse on the second night than it had been on the first. The cast was more accustomed to its position and was decidedly emboldened thereby. It was one of the instances in which boldness did not improve the original defects from which the performance had suffered. They say that familiarity breeds contempt, and in this case familiarity did most distinctly breed contempt in the minds of the small fry who were personating the characters of Ali Baba and kindred heroes of fiction. They gabbled, they giggled, they nudged one another, and where they did remember their lines they curiously distorted the sentences

entirely from their original meanings, and gradually the countenances of the stolid patrons of the entertainment were overspread with the most unmitigated contempt, and I am convinced that only the prompt action of Lord Ceespring saved the evening from being an even yet more hideous failure than the one which had gone before it. I must say that I admired the Colonel's tact on that occasion, for the audience seemed to get frozen harder and harder as the performance dragged its slow length along. It was a happy thought of Lord Ceespring's, or of Lady Ceespring's, which suggested coffee and ices in an adjacent apartment as a little social break in the entertainment, for not all the enthusiasm of the proud fathers squeezed in at the back of the hall could enliven that audience into anything like a cordial feeling towards the Dutch doll-like deportment and expression of the youngsters on the stage.

"Now, Mr. Mayor," I heard Lord Ceespring say, "I must present you to the indefatigable lady who has stage-managed the whole thing, who has drilled the young-

sters and, as we consider, worked wonders."

So the Mayor was escorted to Geraldine, who was looking her prettiest and her brightest. I don't think that, left to himself, the Mayor would have been overwhelmingly civil to my wife, but, under the fostering care of Lord Ceespring, he did his best to find a few compliments fitting for her youth and, I think I may fairly be allowed to say, her beauty. "But you know," he went on, when he had told a great many lies about the extreme cleverness of the youthful actors, "I do not consider that you have in any wise carried off the honors entirely from us. Now, of course, we do not at our chapel altogether encourage play-acting—I am a very liberal-minded man myself, and I do not see any harm in it, but there are spirits among us who have very strong views on the matter of theatres and play-acting—but the little people at our Sabbath school, they do very clever things. We have Mrs. Jarley's wax-works, why, as natural as life, I assure you they are, and last Christmas time, we got up a representation of Pilgrim's Progress

which was really very well done. I think, Mrs. Lipscombe, if you will allow me to say so, that we could show you the way round even on your own lines. You see, we only take the pick of the congregation, and I am bound to say that our youngsters show an earnestness that is very satisfactory."

Geraldine explained that this was the first attempt that the children of the Black Horse had ever made at doing anything beyond being entertained. I must say that Geraldine understood the class of people from which mayors usually spring down to the very ground. In the twinkling of an eye she had the old chap interested by cunning mentions of her work in London and of her regret at having had to give it all up on her marriage, and the impossibility she found of living a life of mere pleasure without trying in some way to brighten the lives of others. And then she introduced me to him, though all the old boy told me was that I had got a treasure, which I knew without any information from him. But as we all went back into the room, I noticed that he spoke to several of

the reporters who were there in the interest of the local papers. The result of all this was that when Saturday came round, there were columns devoted to the brilliant theatrical display by the children of the 25th Royal Dragoons. I suppose newspaper people get so into the habit of telling lies that they think nothing of it, but I don't know that I ever saw quite such a tissue of untruthfulness and exaggeration in any one newspaper article in my life before, and the worst of it was that Geraldine swallowed every word of it as being absolutely genuine. I could not make her see the right side of things uppermost, try as I would, she only pointed triumphantly to what the paper said and told me I was an old silly and that I was jealous. I *was* jealous, but not in the way she meant.

After this, our downfall and my degradation was rapid. Geraldine became popular in Danford. Geraldine became something more than popular with the ranks of the Black Horse. I tried gently restraining her at first. I represented to her that it would not do, that no good could come of

all this flaunting of the children here, there and everywhere, but what influence had my outwardly selfish words as compared with the intoxicating praises and adulation of all the married women of the regiment?

That pantomime was repeated several times, and as the brats who played in it got more confident, and I may say more word perfect, so did they get proportionately more impudent and more unmanageable. The effect of it spread like a fever. When the pantomime, with Mrs. Lipscombe in attendance, had been performed at various Sabbath schools or other institutions for the benefit of some strictly local charity or organization, we found that some of the men were organizing a circus. Now we had had circuses before, and I don't know on the whole that a circus is not a very fine thing in a regiment, but we somehow got to be all circus. We very soon started "Happy Evenings" and concerts, and as in everything Geraldine was aided and abetted by Lord and Lady Ceespring, I was powerless to do anything to prevent it. Nobody else liked it. We were continu-

ally having complaints of some kind or other of small crimes which were distinctly traceable to the effect of all this gayety in the ranks.

"Mark my words," I said to Geraldine one day, when she had refused a really smart dinner because of some trumpery entertainment for the children, "mark my words, some definite harm will come of all this. You are infusing a radical and democratic spirit in the regiment which will do more harm than anything else in the world can do."

"Well, Lord Ceespring doesn't say so," said Geraldine.

"No, perhaps Lord Ceespring doesn't because Lady Ceespring doesn't. Lord Ceespring is, or used to be, a very smart soldier, and he ought to know better than to encourage all this socialism. As long as you kept to your 'Happy Afternoons,' and your mothers' meetings and even your pantomimes, you were comparatively harmless, but when you start the married women clamoring for their rights—well, all I can say is, the sooner for the good of the Service I can clear out of it, the better."

Geraldine looked up at me with scared eyes. "I don't know what you mean," she said, quite seriously.

"Don't you? Well, perhaps that is quite as well. I mean this, that I hear a meeting is to take place to-day among the women on the strength of the regiment for the purpose of arranging the terms in which they are going to ask the Colonel to limit their hours of work. I hear, too, that the married women are going to get up a cricket club of their own. Now you must know perfectly well that the Service has got on very well without married women's cricket clubs up to the present time, and that if any such tomfoolery is started in the Black Horse, the Black Horse will very soon get a black cross marked against it up at the Horse Guards."

"I don't see why they shouldn't have a cricket club," said Geraldine, indignantly.

"I don't see why they should. Their husbands have got a cricket club, let 'em look after their cooking and their babies."

"Yes, that is what men always say," Geraldine cried—"Rock your cradles!"

that is the men's cry. Why shouldn't the poor things have a little innocent recreation as well as their husbands?"

"Well, they have got their recreation; they needn't have them so blatant as cricket and suchlike. I wonder they do not petition to have a tennis court made for them and to have dancing lessons and suchlike!"

"Well, really, Derry," said Geraldine, "I do call you downright unkind! All the poor things want is for leave to play on a certain bit of green on summer evenings, when the work of the day is all done. It wouldn't do anybody any harm; they wouldn't be where the officers could see them, and there need be no spluttering made to the Horse Guards at all."

"No, but there will be. And what is this about the women going on strike?"

"Oh, I never heard anything about it," she said, with careless indifference. "I don't believe there is anything in it."

My words may have had a salutary effect. At all events I did not hear of any particularly startling complications for the next few weeks. Geraldine devoted herself to

me a good deal and went to such entertainments as Danford had to offer with quite exemplary praiseworthiness. Then we went to town for a fortnight's leave. By that time the first anniversary of our wedding-day had come round, that is to say, it fell three days before we went off to London. To the great surprise of both of us, the day was marked by a presentation from the women and children of the regiment, and Geraldine became the proud and delighted possessor of an electro-plated butter-dish and knife, together with a neatly written address, tied up with pink ribbons, which was presented to her and gabbled over by a small child wearing a white frock, which looked remarkably cold, with an exceedingly large yellow sash. I shall not readily forget that child—that little spokeswoman. I had known it for several years ; it was no beauty to start with, broad faced and snub-nosed, with a mane of short black hair sticking out in every direction ; for the occasion it had been washed and scrubbed until it fairly shone again, and the black locks had been brushed up and tied with a yellow ribbon of a different shade to

the sash, so tightly that the eyelids were dragged up in truly celestial fashion.

Geraldine showed to great advantage that afternoon. She thanked the deputation very prettily, and even went so far as to kiss the little mover of the address, and she told them that she could not imagine how they had divined that she was in want of a butter-dish exactly like that one. She had never told me that she wanted a butter-dish exactly like that one, in fact I thought that butter-dishes were rather at a discount in our establishment, for our friends had been especially lavish in that article of luxury. And when she had shaken hands with everybody and the mothers had had cake and wine, and the children had had cake and milk, and finally the house had got clear again, she came and stood beside me where I was standing looking at our new acquisition. She slipped her hand under my arm. "Wasn't it sweet of them, dear things?" she remarked.

"Did you want a butter-dish, Geraldine," I asked.

"No, dear boy, of course I didn't, but I couldn't tell them that. I could not tell

them that I had four silver butter-dishes when they had only brought me an electro-plated one."

"What are you going to do with it?" I inquired, wondering whether she really had any regard for the truth, or whether this was only what would be called a white lie.

"Do with it? Oh—well, dear, we'll use it for breakfast for a bit."

"And afterwards?"

"Oh, I don't know. We shall be going away— Oh, I forgot, they are going with us when we do go. Oh, well, perhaps I shall put it away and only bring it out on state occasions."

"What sort of state occasions?"

"Oh, when I have mothers' meetings and that kind of thing. People like to see their things used. Yes, I think we had better do that. We can keep it for putting sweets in when I have any of them to tea."

"It seems to me," I said, rather severely, "that for a young woman who was so very prompt in declaring that she had been in want of exactly such an article, you make out a very poor case when I ask you what you are going to do with it."

"Oh, well, dear, of course I don't really want it, but then it was very kind of them to remember my wedding-day, however prosaically, and I love to have it. I was obliged to say something pretty, because of course it must have been a great pleasure to them to get it for me; the least I could do was to say thank you."

"Well, I will leave that to your own conscience," I said dryly, "but as we are going to London, I do hope that you will leave all your little philanthropic schemes behind you, and not worry about mothers' meetings and all the rest of it when we are away."

Geraldine came close up to where I was sitting and twisted a lissome arm about my neck. "Dear old Derry," she said, "I do wish one thing."

"Yes, and that?"

"Well, I do wish, Derry, with all my heart and soul, that you didn't grudge me doing a little now and then for the regiment. After all, it is *your* regiment."

"My dear child," I said, "I cannot help grudging. I don't want to be grudging, but I cannot help it. I never want to be

grumpy or to thwart you in any way. I am much too fond of you to wish to cast any cloud over you, why should I, when my chiefest desire is to make you happy? But when I see you going on what I feel is a wrong tack, when I see your sweetness and your unselfishness tending to create an entirely opposite effect to that which you intend, I can't help speaking, even at the risk of appearing grudging and ungracious. Perhaps it is because I have not been used to this kind of thing that I have got a feeling that something disastrous is coming. If it does, the whole blame will fall upon you, and through you upon me. The Ceesprings will never own up that they are quite as much to blame as you are, and more so, yes, more so, because they are experienced people, who understand soldiering, as you cannot do for some years to come. Forgive me if I have ever said anything to hurt you, because you must know that your Old Slow Coach has no other interests in life but yours."

PART VIII.

Chapter XV.**SOMETHING HAPPENS.**

I FOUND my mother-in-law keenly interested in the progress that our life had made since she left us at Danford. The first time that Geraldine left me to my fate after we took up our abode at Eaton Terrace, I came in about five o'clock to find Mrs. Brodie just pouring out her afternoon tea. "Oh, my dear boy, you are just in time for tea," she said, "and I have got the most delightful hot cakes you ever tasted. Where is Geraldine?"

"Geraldine has gone slumming somewhere or other," I replied. I was rather sorry that I was obliged to say that Geraldine had gone slumming, but Mrs. Brodie was not a woman whom one could deceive with impunity.

"Ah, it is like dram-drinking," she said, in her dryest tones. "Derrick," she went on, looking at me as she handed me a cup of fragrant tea, all cream and dainties, "Your married life has been a great disappointment to me."

"I hope not, Mrs. Brodie," I said. And I meant it.

"Yes, my dear boy, a great disappointment to me. You know my girls have been a disappointment to me. I set such hopes upon Magdalen, she was so clever, she passed every examination she went in for, she was so unlike the empty-headed girl that one calls the girl of the period. I thought she would be a comfort and stay, and marry some big specialist in Cavendish Square, you know, and be a credit to me, instead of which she is always flying about yearning to alter the custom of ages. I was proud of Magdalen twenty years ago—well, not quite twenty years ago, but fifteen, yes, fifteen years ago—I felt like an old hen that had hatched an auk's egg, but I have long since learned the bitterness of hatching something very superior to oneself. Geraldine was different, Geraldine

was pretty, she took a wholesome interest in the pleasures of the world, although she was tainted with some of her sister's fads; at one time I had almost given up Geraldine as a hopeless case, but when she married and married a young man in such a very frivolous profession as yours is, with money and position and youth, and, I think I may fairly say, Derrick, without thoroughly upsetting you by encouraging your vanity, good looks, I did hope that she was going to blossom out into an ordinary young married woman. I had my doubts at Danford, doubts that were confirmed every day, and now you see she has only been in town a few days when she is off slumming again. My dear boy, it is like dram-drinking. They say that a real drunkard, you know, never gets permanently cured, I believe it is the same with slumming."

"I hope not, Mrs. Brodie," I said, helping myself to some of her good hot cake; "but at the same time, of course if it pleases Geraldine to do it, why, she must do it."

"But you would like her better if she did not? If she had other occupations?"

"No, I cannot say that I should, I cannot imagine myself liking Geraldine better under any circumstances."

"My poor boy," said Mrs. Brodie, looking at me with pitying eyes, "is it so bad as that? Indeed, I am sorry for you—I am sorry for you. When one looks forward twenty years and wonders what Geraldine may have developed into by that time unless something happens to arrest the progress of the disease—well, in my case I almost hope that I shall not be alive to see it."

"But you may say the same of Magdalen?"

"Of Magdalen? Ah, with Magdalen I have got hardened, Magdalen is no longer a trouble to me, she is a cross. I bear it, I hope I bear it with tolerable cheerfulness; if not with cheerfulness, I at all events bear it with a certain amount of common sense; but Geraldine was the apple of my eye, and I had such hopes of her when she married you. But tell me, my dear boy, how have you got on with your every-day life since I left you?"

Now I was very fond of Mrs. Brodie, but

I could not tell tales of my wife to her mother. I told her that Geraldine had done a little, wholly and solely in and for the regiment, that none of the other married ladies had time or inclination to take up the work that Geraldine had made her own, and that the Colonel and Lady Ceespring were particularly encouraging to her and full of praise for what she had done.

"Why doesn't Lady Ceespring do that sort of thing herself then?" said Mrs. Brodie brusquely, "she is the Colonel's wife and she is a much older woman than Geraldine. It would be much more proper if she worked the regiment, as you call it."

I did not think it necessary to explain to Mrs. Brodie that the term "working the regiment" was not mine but one of Geraldine's own phrases. I replied as to Lady Ceespring, "Well, you see, Lady Ceespring is rather delicate and there are children, four or five children—five, I think—and they are young, and the Colonel has an idea she is made of sugar and salt, and somehow she has never begun that kind of work. I don't know," I said,

"but I fancy Lady Ceespring had rather a rough time before she was married—I have heard a hint or two dropped—and Ceespring is always more or less trying to make up to her for it."

"Oh, that's it—I see, yes, I see. I saw some of her little children when I was with you. What a pity Geraldine hasn't a baby!"

Well, I was like every other fellow, I thought it *was* a pity, but then as you cannot order babies from the baker's, it was no use my making myself miserable because we had been married a year and had not yet set up a nursery. I did not care to discuss the question either, and I helped myself to another bit of cake and said, "All in good time, Mrs. Brodie, all in good time."

"Ah," said my mother-in-law, "the day that Geraldine has a baby, my dear boy, will be the happiest day in your life. A woman with a young baby, and ideas about duty, cannot do much slumming; she can't worry after other people's babies, that's a certainty."

"Well, my dear Mrs. Brodie," I said,

"we must leave those and all such matters to chance. Whatever Geraldine does is always right in my eyes." It was not true, but I chose to say so. "And if sometimes she makes mistakes, they are the mistakes of a too zealous nature, of a mind and a heart which are overflowing with goodness towards those less well placed in the world than herself. I must confess that I would rather not have half a hundred unruly brats to tea every week and I do not take any interest in mothers' meetings, and I really do not see why one should start circulating libraries for the use of the privates' wives, and I do not myself see the good of half the schemes that Geraldine has on hand at the present moment; but, at the same time, I can't help loving her better for the qualities which make her take all this trouble for those who can never do anything for her. Ten chances to one she won't even have common gratitude. She has it now, all the same. I don't know whether she told you, but the women and children gave her a butter-dish thing on our wedding day."

"You mean when you were married?"

"No, on the first anniversary of our marriage. Geraldine was enormously pleased with it."

"But Geraldine had ever so many butterdishes when she was married."

"Well, she had, and this one is an electro-plated thing. It isn't much to look at, but then, as she says, it is the spirit which prompted the gift that has pleased her so much. Of course, the great danger is that she may get all these poor uneducated women to feel above themselves and that, in a regiment, would be a very dangerous and a very disastrous consequence, but whatever happens, she has the strongest approval of the Ceesprings, and I must confess that I love Geraldine better for her unselfish thought of others."

My mother-in-law put down her tea-cup and picked up her knitting. It was apparently the same stocking which she had been knitting on the day that I broke the news of my engagement to her, but as I had seen that stocking ended—"taken off," I think they call it—and another one begun immediately, I knew that it must be merely a fac-simile. She clicked her needles together

in a way which made me think of Dickens's "Tale of Two Cities." "Well," she said, at last in a tone of concentrated dryness and bitterness, "it is a very good thing for Geraldine that you feel as you do. Geraldine might have married a thousand men before she would have found one who would feel in that way. I may be unworthy, but I confess that I always thought my girls might have shown a little more thought and care for me than they did. It is not for me to decry Geraldine—I am the last woman in the world to do such a thing—but at the same time there is a point when unselfishness becomes selfishness, and I do hope, Derrick, that you will not encourage your wife in reaching that point. As I said to you just now, the best thing that could possibly happen to you would be for Geraldine to have a baby—but I think I hear her, surely, that is her footstep?"

The next moment Geraldine came into the room. "Hullo! What's the matter?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing—nothing. I don't feel very well. Can I have some tea, mother?"

"My dear! Can you have some tea?"

May you breathe? Shall I turn you out into the street? What next!"

"Oh, don't, don't, mother—don't make fun of me. I am a little over-tired."

"Then let me have some fresh tea made for you; Derrick and I have finished. Ring the bell, Derrick—Oh, here is Wilson. Wilson, I am glad you have brought some more tea, Mrs. Lipscombe is tired."

The parlor maid appeared with a fresh tea-pot and what was evidently another cake, for she had possibly seen Geraldine coming down the street. Mrs. Brodie ministered to her and teased her into eating quite a good meal, but I saw plainly enough that something out of the common had happened to upset my wife. However, it was not until we went to our bedroom for the purpose of dressing for dinner, that I found out what had really happened. "Geraldine," I said, "what is the matter? What has happened?"

"Oh, Derrick—oh, Derrick—oh, I don't know how to tell you—something dreadful, something awful! Oh, I am so unhappy. What a hard, cruel world this is!"

"But what *has* happened?"

“My dear boy,” she said, looking at me with distressed eyes, “you will hardly believe me when I tell you that—John Fraser has deserted!”

Chapter XVI.

NO TIME FOR TRIFLING.

I LOOKED at Geraldine incredulously. "Fraser? Deserted?" I replied blankly.

"Fraser has deserted. He—oh, to think of it, it is too dreadful! Our own man, engaged to Brooke, and with the whole regiment in hue and cry after him!"

"But how do you know?"

"Because I have seen him."

"You have seen Fraser who has deserted?"

"Yes. Brooke came up this afternoon."

"Without leave?"

"Oh, yes, yes. She knew that that would be all right, she knew that I should have told her to do just what she did. She came here—fortunately mother was out—and as Brooke did not say who she was, the maids here do not know that she was

from Danford at all. Mother chaffed me about having gone slumming, and you thought that I had from the little note that I left you, but I have not been slumming at all, Derry, I have been with poor Brooke to see Fraser's people. She knew he would go home."

"And he did?"

"Yes, yes. I saw him."

"But, my dear, I cannot have you communicating with deserters. Did the fellow give you no reason?"

"Well, he did. He says that—that—although we did not know it, the whole regiment is in a state of mutiny, that everybody is dissatisfied, that Lord Ceespring, who used to be so popular, is so wrapped up in his own concerns that he doesn't take the smallest interest in what happens to the men, and they are all agreed that Sir Anthony Staunton is worse—much worse. Fraser says that he simply couldn't stand it any longer, that they are not treated like human beings—they are so many slaves under the thumb of the non-commissioned officers, who are all in turn under the thumb of the adjutant, and the——"

"Oh, that's absurd," I broke in.

"Well, that is what Fraser told me, that they are all slaves under the adjutant and the quartermaster, that their meat is bad, their bread is uneatable, that the whole regiment is one mass of bribery and corruption. They are girded at day and night, and Fraser declares that had it not been for his being your servant, he simply could not have stood it as long as he has done. As soon as we left home every advantage seems to have been taken of him—Brooke says it is perfectly true—he has been charged with all sorts of crimes. He seems to have got it into his head, goodness knows how or why, that you were leaving, that you were not going back again, and he says he simply could not face life in the regiment under any other conditions."

"But we are going back again."

"Yes, but then you see he had already passed the Rubicon before he knew that—it is done, he has taken the fatal step; he won't go back now. I told him he ought to go back."

"But, my dear girl, you told him that

you would have to tell me where you had seen him ? ”

“ No, I told him I wouldn’t tell you where I had seen him.”

“ You told Fraser that you would keep his whereabouts a secret from me ? ”

“ Well, I’m afraid I did, Derry.”

I felt myself turning cold. “ Geraldine, Geraldine, what have you done ? ” I cried.

“ I have not done anything, Derry.”

“ My dear girl, you have promised a private soldier of my regiment—a deserter—that you, the wife of one of his officers, will keep his whereabouts secret from the authorities. You cannot do it.”

“ I have promised, Derry,” she said.

“ Well, my dear, you have promised—you have put the interests of a traitor, which every deserter is, against the interests of your husband. You don’t suppose for one moment that this can be kept a secret ? You don’t suppose that the police won’t get hold of the fact that Brooke came tearing up to you, that Brooke is engaged to him, that you and Brooke went off together somewhere and that you saw him ? You cannot keep it a

secret. I know that you know where this man is——”

“ I don’t know where he is.”

“ But you know where he was at some time this afternoon. You, an officer’s wife, had communication with a deserter, one of your own servants, and you refuse to tell even your own husband all that you know! It is an incredible situation. It is—Geraldine, I don’t want to say anything unkind to you, but it is maddening, it is impossible.”

“ But I have given my word,” said Geraldine obstinately.

“ My dear girl, if you find yourself hauled up before a court-martial and you are put on your oath, you must tell all that you know.”

“ I won’t tell all that I know.”

“ Very well, then, there is only one course open to me.”

“ And that? ” she said in a questioning tone; it was only a questioning tone, there was nothing defiant, there was unmistakably no wish either to stand out against me or to in any sense aggravate me, not even a desire to palliate her offence.

She had given her word, and if it cost her her life she evidently meant to stick to it."

"That," I said, speaking very coldly, "is to send my papers in at once, to go back to Danford alone and throw myself on the Colonel's mercy, and as he is very much to blame for all this tomfoolery in which you have been indulging so long and so entirely against my wishes, it is probable that very scant mercy shall I have from him."

"You—you—would send in your papers," Geraldine stammered.

"As an honorable man, I don't see that I have any other course. The only way in which I can save you from this—this—absolute disgrace is to throw up my commission at once. I don't see what else I can do; I don't see that there is any other course open to me. By doing that, I may save you from the whole world knowing the horrible situation in which you have put yourself."

"But I have not put myself into a horrible situation. How can you say it? It isn't just to say so!" she burst out, speak-

ing for the first time with some show of passion.

"My dear Geraldine, I understand you, I understand you down to the very depths of your innocent, trusting and kind-hearted soul. You, who think you have gauged London wickedness to its depths, are still so unspotted by the world that you don't realize how differently such a story will show when it is told in the bald words in which the world will tell it. This is how people will talk—'What happened to Lipscombe? Ugh, poor devil, married a girl, sly sort of girl, well-born and all that, but always slumming about London—took her down to the regiment, she tried all her slumming dodges on in the ranks—end of it, next door to a mutiny, Mrs. Lipscombe mixed up with her own man-servant, chap deserted—Mrs. Lipscombe knew his whereabouts and refused to betray him—inference—H'm, natural.'"

Geraldine looked at me with a scared white face. "Derrick," she said, between her teeth, "do you think that anybody will *dare* to say that about me?"

"Think? My dear girl, I don't think, I

know they will. Any man would say it, any woman would believe it, nobody will realize how you have spoiled my life out of your own innocence and your own tenderness of heart, nobody will realize how utterly good you are down at the bottom; they will look at the result, and the result is that my career in the Army is at an end; the result is that I cannot go back to my regiment and look my own comrades in the face, the result is—Oh, it is too dreadful, it is too horrible! And to think that you lightly gave your word to the sweetheart of your own maid—to your husband's servant—without giving that husband, without giving yourself one thought! It is maddening!"

"Derrick," she said, "if I go back, if I go to the court-martial—that is, if they catch him—if I go to the Colonel, if everything comes out, if I tell everything I know and explain to them why I could not break my word, that I gave it thoughtlessly, that I regret it bitterly, won't that do something?"

"Yes, it will do something—it will make matters ten thousand times worse."

"Derrick, what am I to do?"

"You can't do anything. You have given your word to a traitor, you are helpless. Heaven knows what the end of it all will be, if all this fellow has told you is true—and likely enough it is true, for Ceespring is wrapped up in his own domestic concerns and ought to have chucked the Service long since; Staunton never was a soldier, nice chap, careless, indifferent, devil-may-care, there isn't a ha'pennyworth of soldiering in him—half the regiment incompetent, half the ranks London blackguards who care for nothing; there's a pretty storm brewing. The Service isn't like what it used to be, even when I first joined; regulations have been fooled about till it isn't worth men's while to put themselves into bondage; it isn't worth men's while to become the slaves of brutes not as good as they are themselves. There was a chance of keeping things pretty quiet as long as there was a hold over the wives, there was a chance of bread and butter interest keeping the married men steady, but you have undone all that. Geraldine, I saw it coming, I warned you months and months ago

that the end of it all would be bad, and all I could get from you was that the Colonel and Lady Ceespring did everything they could to encourage you."

"But what am I to do?" said Geraldine, frantically.

"What are you to do? I don't know. The best course you can take is to do nothing, to hope and pray, day and night, that this poor devil may get away; to hope and pray that he may not be taken alive, that anything may happen rather than that your name should be dragged into it. What about Brooke, where is she?"

"Brooke? Oh, Brooke is going back to-night to Danford."

"Can she hold her tongue?"

"Why, yes, of course she can; she has every inducement to keep quiet, she loves Fraser; wild horses wouldn't drag a shred of information out of her."

"She thinks not," I remarked. Well, I daresay I did speak rather bitterly; I felt more bitter than gall and wormwood. "But that class of girl, pretty, inconsequent, fluttering about with her head half off, won't have the wit or the brains to

withstand clever questioning. Of course she has told her fellow-servants down at Danford that he has deserted—naturally they will have missed him—they will know that she came up to town—What train is she going back by?"

"I don't know," said Geraldine, pitiously.

"You don't know? Why, you haven't even taken the precaution to make anything safe! Of course they will question her, of course they will—but there, what is the good of wasting time like this? Do you think she will be going back by the seven-twenty?"

"I don't know, Derry. I should think she would."

"It's no use thinking, we want to know something. If I go to the station"—I looked at my watch—"it is too late, it is no use, it is too late! What in the world are we to do? I had better go down by the last train to-night, see the Colonel, tell him everything, see if he will be good natured enough to hush it up, if it has not already got beyond his power—yes, that is what I had better do. There is a train

at ten forty-five, I will go down by that. I will go up to the Colonel's the first thing in the morning, catch him before he gets off to barracks; he will understand the position that I am placed in, whether he will be man enough to stand by me, Heaven only knows!"

At that moment the dinner-bell rang. We had neither of us made the smallest attempt at a toilet. "It is no use our spoiling your mother's dinner," I said brusquely, "I will tell her that I have had bad news from the regiment, she won't ask particulars, and do you hold your tongue—do you hold your tongue altogether about this as well as you can hold your tongue—about that traitor, Fraser."

I turned away—well, I was very angry—and I went out of the room for the first time in my life without a glance at my wife and without kissing her. I made some sort of a garbled explanation to my mother-in-law, who looked at me with her shrewd blue eyes and knew that I was hiding something serious—knew that I was lying; but whatever her suspicions, she respected my reticence, and Geraldine was as mute

and as discreet as even I could wish. I told Mrs. Brodie that I should have to go down to Danford by the mail that night and that I should probably be back the following day.

"And Geraldine will stay here?" she said, inquiringly.

"Yes, Geraldine will stay here. There is no need to drag her down on a piece of regimental business. I shall be back some time to-morrow; if not, that is to say if anything should happen to keep me at Danford, I will wire you in the morning."

She asked no more questions, she was a model mother-in-law, and when dinner was over I went up to my room to see after my portmanteau and arrange for my journey. I had not spoken to Geraldine except in a general way since our conversation before dinner, but just as I was putting my things into a portmanteau she came into the room."

"Derry," she said, hesitatingly, "I believe you are awfully angry with me."

"I am not at all angry," I replied; "but I can't help being dreadfully upset. I naturally do not want to sulk with you



"I HAVE BEEN A FOOL—I HAVE BEEN A GREAT FOOL,
DERRY."—*Page 197.*



about it, and, of course, I do not believe that you wittingly put your foot into this frightful hole; but I do want to do the best that I can for both of us. I do want to save you from the slur of any such story getting out into the world."

She came close to me.

"Derry," she said, "don't steel yourself against me. I can't bear it. I have been a fool—I have been a great fool, Derry. I thought I knew more about humanity than I do. Only let me get out of this scrape and I will give up slumming now and forever, that I will promise you."

Under these circumstances, neither I nor anybody else in the wide world could, I firmly believe, have resisted Geraldine. She was fascination personified. I did what any other man in the same situation would have done; I kissed her and told her to be of good cheer, that I would do my very best to pull her through the unpleasant quagmire in which she had landed herself.

"But you will never forgive me if you have to leave the Service," she said, penitently.

"Well, I shall have to do that—either to

leave the Service or to exchange. I could not take you back to the regiment where you have made yourself so unhappily popular and expect you to begin life afresh, and to take up the same position as the other married ladies have found it wise to do. I do not think I should care to go into another regiment. But if I give up, we won't talk about it at all; if we can only get out of it with honor to ourselves, I shall be quite satisfied. After all, to give up the Service is not much of a price to pay for your giving up all your pet philanthropic fid-fads."

She looked at me half shyly.

"Derry," she said, "I think that, perhaps—before very long—I may have other things to interest me than what you and mother have always called my fid-fads, and, of course, in that case," hesitating a little, "I should have to give up most of my outside interests, and particularly visiting among the poor. I should not like to run the risk of bringing home any kind of infection into my own—nursery."

* * * * *

I do not feel inclined to tell in detail the rest of the story. It was, perhaps, rather a cheap way out of it; but after I had seen the Colonel, found my own sergeant-major haranguing the unfortunate Brooke, who was in a state of wild hysterics, but resolute in giving no details of her journey to London, except that she had been up to try to learn news of her sweetheart from her mistress, had heard of all the trouble and disaffection which seemed to be rife in the Black Horse, and had found that no actual suspicion had attached itself to Geraldine beyond a mild growl from Lord Ceespring on the subject of "one's wives interfering with the internal economy of the regiment, don't you know, Lipscombe," I quietly sent in my papers, and made all arrangements for leaving the regiment and Danford.

Geraldine never went back again. We see the Ceesprings and the Stauntons sometimes, for they have both left the Service now, and the old Black Horse is ruled by a martinet, who, as Lester Brookes, now senior major, put to me, "gruels them all like the very devil!"

And we have almost forgotten that we had ever anything to do with following the drum. Geraldine never went in for slumming again. Perhaps, both changes in our lives were as well, for some little time after the disappearance of the dissatisfied Fraser, leaving behind him the broken heart of the hysterical and disconsolate Brooke, this announcement appeared in the daily papers :

“On the 10th inst., at 63 Great Cumberland Place, the wife of Derrick Lipscombe, late of the 25th Royal Dragoons, of twin sons.”

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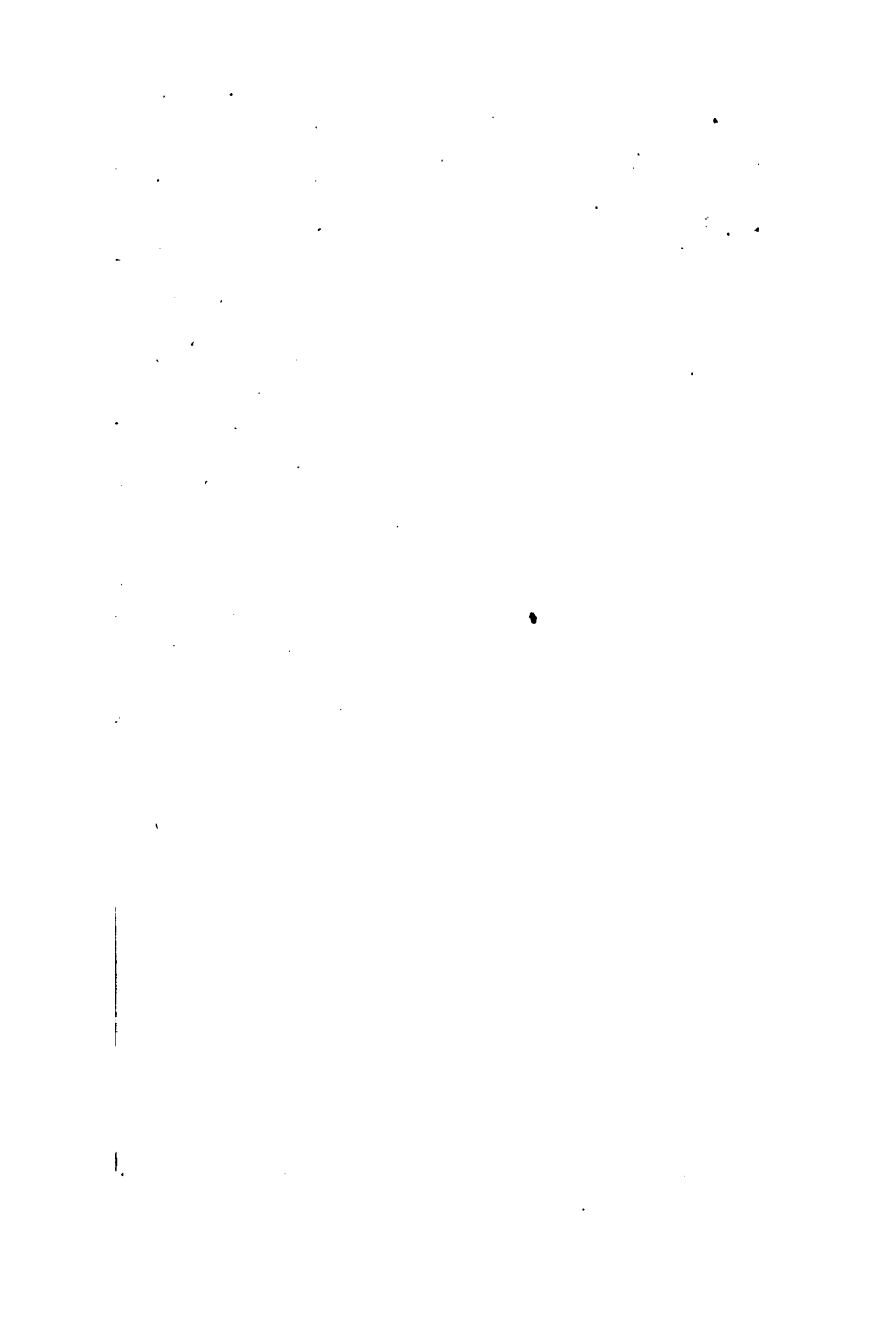
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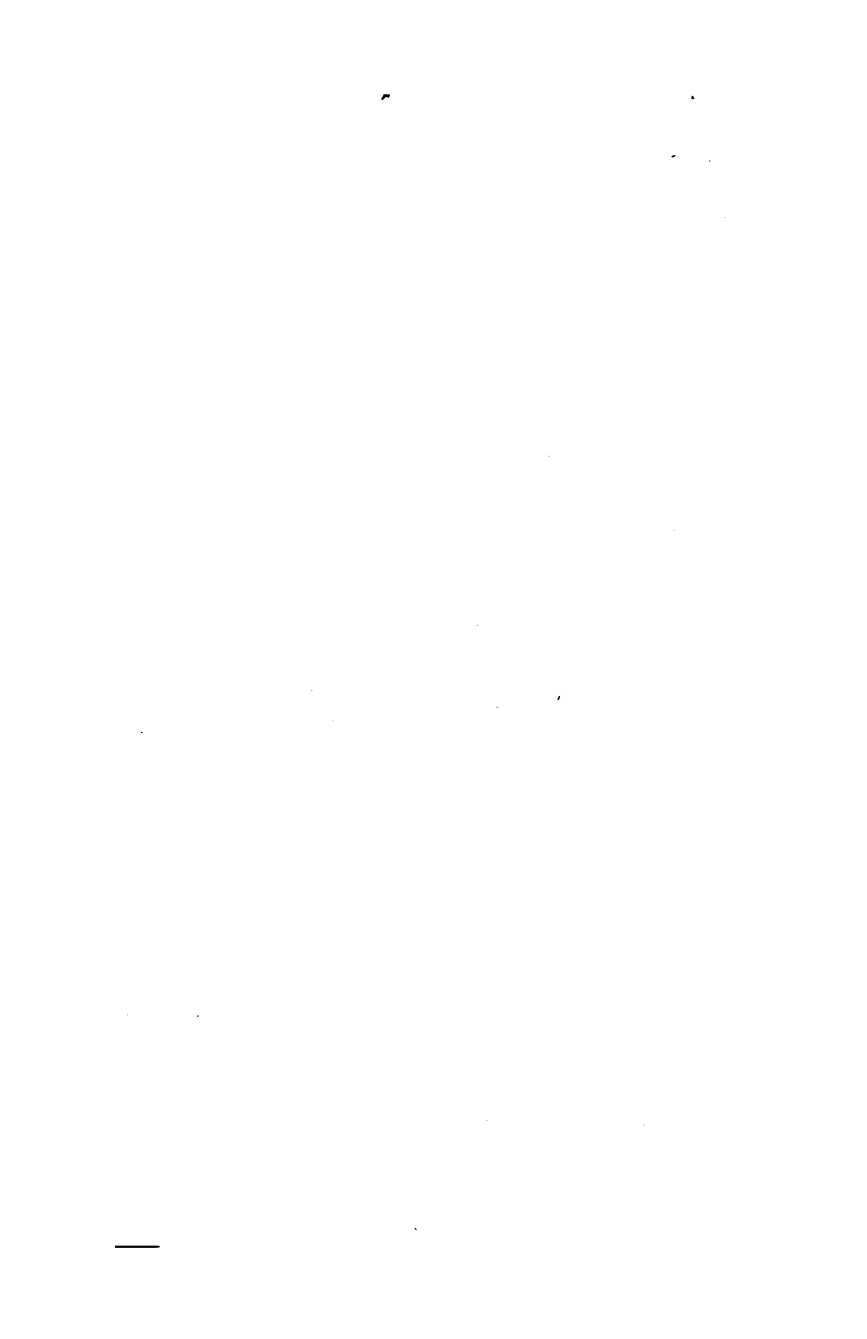
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